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Framing the Crisis in the Merrimack Valley: The Opioid Epidemic, White Despair and Authoritarian  
Populism on the New England Borderlands

A Dissertation Presented  
by  
GYURI S. KEPES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2019

Department of Communication

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By  
GYURI S. KEPES

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Department of Communication

## DEDICATION

To all of the individuals, families, and communities who have experienced loss and trauma as a result of the opioid crisis.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to send sincere gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Mari Castaneda, who provided much needed encouragement through the most trying periods of the research and writing process. I really could not have completed this project without your prudent advice and erudite perspective.

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING THE CRISIS IN THE MERRIMACK VALLEY: THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC,  
WHITE DESPAIR AND AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM ON THE NEW ENGLAND

BORDERLANDS

SEPTEMBER 2019

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Directed by: Professor Mari Castañeda

This dissertation examines how discourses and ideologies about the opioid crisis were framed, produced and constructed in the geographic specificity of the Merrimack Valley in the period leading up to the 2016 presidential election. Applying the theoretical and methodological frameworks offered by the cultural studies tradition, this dissertation project attempts to map out the complex interplay between the news media, law enforcement, policymakers, and citizens in producing, circulating, amplifying, framing and sustaining public anxiety about the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley and beyond. Employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry, including interpretation of data collected through text mining, text visualization, sentiment and emotion analysis, and coding software, this project examines the dominant framing devices used in local television coverage of the opioid crisis in New Hampshire, analyzes images and discourses to three prominent opioid analgesic poisoning cases in the Merrimack Valley, and investigates the dominant discursive themes in several dozen speeches delivered by Jeff Sessions during his short tenure as Attorney General. Together, these analyses

demonstrate that strategic portrayals of drugs, addiction, treatment, and justice can frame the opioid crisis to advance particular political and social agendas.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Introduction

With death tolls mounting, it is imperative to cultivate a better understanding of the various rhetorical responses to the opioid crisis in the United States—from citizens impacted directly or indirectly, from state actors (policy makers, the judiciary and police) and from the private sector (the pharmaceutical, health, and mass media industries). Across news networks, public forums, testimonials from police, and political campaign materials the opioid crisis is increasingly presented as a public health issue, rather than a criminal one. As a discursive and practical intervention this comes at a unique historical and cultural juncture, when both popular perceptions about the war on drugs and the demographics of opioid use has shifted. Loudening denunciations of punitive approaches to non-violent drug offences, along with the dramatic surge in opioid abuse among “visible” populations across rural and suburban America, have thrown the issue of addiction to the forefront of public agendas. Panic about the dangers of powerful opioids has simultaneously circulated widely, amplified by the news media, and further stoked by the rhetoric of lawmakers, federal and local law enforcement, health and disease specialists, recovery advocates, and concerned citizens.

This dissertation will examine how discourses and ideologies about the opioid crisis are framed and constructed through their production and circulation, using the theoretical and methodological frameworks offered by the Cultural Studies tradition, drawing specifically from Stuart Hall’s critical contributions to the study of race and class. Critical Cultural Studies provides a productive lens for viewing the relationship between the state, media, political economy—and the war on drugs—as a shifting ideological and material

configuration upheld by state apparatuses, propelled by economic structures and imperatives, and sustained by and through symbolic practices, offers a rich site for critical cultural analysis. In the disproportionate damage exacted on the poor and people of color, the war on drugs has repeatedly exposed longstanding racial and socioeconomic inequalities in the United States, and while the latest battle, the opioid epidemic, exposes old contradictions, it also highlights emergent disparities along racial and class lines.

This dissertation project attempts to map out the complex interplay between the news media, law enforcement, policymakers, and citizens in producing, circulating, amplifying, framing and sustaining public anxiety about the opioid crisis in the geographical specificity of the Merrimack Valley. The Merrimack Valley is a region north of Boston that is comprised of 42 small cities and towns stretching across the Massachusetts, New Hampshire line, and has frequently been at the center of both national and regional discussions about the opioid crisis. Analysis of hundreds of locally produced news stories, images and headlines revealed that opioid-related discourses circulated throughout the Merrimack Valley are often memetic of national conversations about drugs, immigration, and public health. Trump's widely publicized claim that illegal immigrants in the sanctuary city of Lawrence Massachusetts are responsible for drugs pouring over the New Hampshire border into many Merrimack Valley communities, for example, can be seen as a scaled down version of the frequently repeated assertion that Mexico has caused the opioid crisis. Lying directly south of the New Hampshire border, Lawrence, Massachusetts, often referred to by its moniker, "Immigrant City," occupies a particular symbolic space in the popular imagination of New England's human ecology. As a longtime haven for Latin American immigrants, a standing recently reinforced by its 'sanctuary' status, Lawrence is often rendered as a subaltern

space—one that exists in opposition to the dominant white social order. The fractious interface between white New England and the immigrant pockets lying within is captured by statements from local and national politicians, which are frequently amplified by the news media. On several occasions, statements from politicians broadcast through airwaves and etched in print publications have stoked moral panics about deadly opioids being funneled across the New Hampshire border and into predominantly white communities. In the process, the immigrant is packed into a powerful archetype—what Stuart Hall (1978) has referred to as a ‘folk devil’—or all that society fears most, condensed into a powerful living symbol. With the opioid epidemic killing at a record clip, there is increasing urgency to quell the mounting crisis, and more and more frequently cracking down on immigration and bolstering border security are framed as the solutions.

At the same time, analysis of news coverage shows that the opioid crisis is frequently framed as a public health issue rather than a criminal one. So, while *immigrants* are viewed through a punitive gaze, the *addict* is treated with compassion. The immigrant is thus faced with detention and deportation, while predominantly white users are offered second chances, diversion from prison, and access to treatment options. These contradictions are not limited to the realm of discourse—they are reinforced by policies drafted by political leaders at the uppermost echelons of the executive and judicial branches. Extensive review of dozens of speeches by former Attorney General Jeffrey Sessions, for example reveal that the opioid crisis was frequently tied to illegal immigration and sanctuary policy debates.

This dissertation deploys a mix of methodological approaches informed by the theoretical framework introduced in the literature review. As an overarching methodological approach, this dissertation utilizes “conjunctural analysis,” as outlined in Stuart Hall et al.’s seminal

masterwork, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. Conjunctural Analysis, based in Althusser's concept of articulation and Gramsci's notion of Hegemony, attempts to map out complex and interderterminant interactions between economic, social, and political actors. Through his conjunctural analysis in *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et al. (1978) show how moral panic about 'mugging' and related discourses emerged as a reaction to specific material transformations in post-war British society. Through a systematic analysis of discourses in circulation, Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate that the 'mugger' stands in for deeper anxieties about material conditions unfolding on the ground, including emergent fractions within the working class and between the old English guard and South Asian and Caribbean immigrants arriving from former British colonies. Hall et al. (1978) observe that anxieties about the dismantling of a once stable English identity are packed into the "mugger" metaphor, giving way simultaneously to moral panic and to popular sympathies for a new Thatcherite anti-immigrant law and order political settlement. In this way, conjunctural analysis provides a productive theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the peculiar cultural forms that emerge through dynamic interfaces between the news media, the judiciary, the police, the state, and its citizenry. Moving forward several decades we can observe similarly how anxieties about white identity, often tied symbolically to the opioid crisis, have given way to growing sympathies for Authoritarian Populism. In this way, the seemingly incipient rise of Trump's brand of Authoritarian Populism is in fact deeply rooted in the Thatcherite political order. In its contemporary manifestations, the folk devil embodied by MS-13 and its immigrant analog, is presaged by the mugger archetype forged in 1970's UK society. In both iterations the 'immigrant as deviant' referential tethering is performed discursively by lawmakers,

members of the judiciary, and by the media. While the mugging crisis was largely manufactured and contrived on the level of representation, the opioid crisis is by all accounts a genuine emergency. Both crises nonetheless are constructed narratively around a white victim and an antagonist of a ‘darker’ race.

Starting with a macro level perspective, this dissertation project tightens its focus to perform a conjunctural analysis of the unique symbolic and material facets of opioid crisis in the local specificity of the Merrimack Valley. Drawing from the discourse of various local actors in the Merrimack Valley, this project attempts to examine how the opioid crisis as a visible materiality is constructed representationally and circulated across a complex web of articulations—between the state, the media, the judiciary, and citizens.

Simultaneously this project combines constructivist and cultural perspectives with ‘new materialist’ ontologies and methodologies. New materialism refers to a range of contemporary perspectives in the humanities and social sciences that draw from (post) Marxism, actor-network theory, phenomenology, post-humanism, and Deleuzian philosophy to appeal for a new “turn to matter” (Fox and Alldred, 2018). While classical materialism focuses on the top-down exercise of control from economic and social structures that determine relations of production, new materialism speculates that the, “world and history are produced by a range of material forces that extend from the physical and the biological to the psychological, social and cultural” (Fox and Alldred, 2018, p. 2). New materialism’s emphasis on the dynamic interactions between material and immaterial, organic and inorganic, humans and non-humans is indebted partly to the concepts of actor-networks (Latour, 2005) biopolitics (Foucault, 1976), and rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). The new material turn is marked by a move from Anthropocene cultural and linguistic inquiry to

one that considers a multiplicity of forms—both physical and nonphysical, human and nonhuman (Fox and Alldred, 2018).

It is argued here that Hall et al.'s (1978) notion of articulations and conjunctures are commensurable with complexity and chaos theories that underline the “new materialist” approach. Conjunctures occur at ruptural moments in which a new settlement is forged out of an extraordinary set of articulations between material and immaterial forces within an indeterminant complex whole—neither a pure reflection of a material base nor an ideological superstructure. In a similar fashion, new materialism accounts for the messy intersections between a range of social, cultural, economic, political, technological, and humanistic forces. Furthermore, since *Policing the Crisis* predates the digital revolution, new materialism provides an appropriate theoretical corollary, by recuperating the ‘material’—principally modern interactive technology. By accounting for new routes of circulation, and new dynamics between human and non-human actors afforded by digital technology, new materialism advances a complimentary framework for understanding the technopolitics and biopolitics of moral panics in the new media environment.

Combining new materialism with conjunctural analysis simultaneously provides a productive framework through which the opioid crisis and its origins can be examined. The opioid crisis was sprung from not just one factor, but by a multiplicity of intersecting forces, including technologies (especially pharmaceutical), psychological, physiological and biochemical processes in the human body, human ecologies and movements, identity, race and class relations, culture, black market economics, criminal justice and drug policy, and national and regional politics. From this angle, the current crisis can be seen as culminating from complex articulations between multifarious forces. The forces that produced the opioid

crisis, however, do not exist in a vacuum—they are intersecting dynamically with a shifting political and economic settlement—one that is often described as “authoritarian populism”. The discourses around authoritarian populism and the opioid crisis, although seemingly distant, this dissertation shows, often overlap at several points of intersection. Consequently, discourses and images related to the opioid crisis can contain important insights into current political and social formations. This dissertation project thus attempts to analyze the situatedness of the opioid-related discourses produced and circulated within contemporary political and social orders and how it is incorporated into its systems of meaning and representation. These discourses are given further scrutiny within the specificity of the Merrimack Valley in the time period leading up to and immediately following the 2016 election.

This dissertation project will combine a new materialist approach to visual rhetoric (Gries, 2015) with Hall et al.’s (1978) concept of conjunctural analysis outlined in *Policing the Crisis* to examine the circulation and amplification of various discourses attached to the opioid crisis. Gries (2015) makes the case for a “visual rhetoric” that treats images and discourses, not as stable, fixed objects, but as inert, transient forms that gain new meanings and consequentialities through their circulation and re-appropriation across time and space. To account for an image’s shifting ‘rhetoricity’, Gries (2015) advocates for a new materialist approach, which considers “...an image’s collective experience after it is initially produced and begins to circulate” (p. 338). To analyze this complex process, this study will employ methodological tools, such as iconographic tracking, that account for how images and texts are transformed by the various actors and technologies they encounter in circulation, and the new discursive forms that emerge as a result of these interactions.



This dissertation also employs a mix of other qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry, including interpretation of data collected through text mining, text visualization, sentiment and emotion analysis, and coding software. The web-based software utilized in this project include NVivo, Voyant Tools, and Parallel Dots. NVivo is a qualitative coding software that allows researchers to code various textual elements within a large corpus of text. Voyant Tools is a multi-platform software that produces text visualization from transcript data. Parallel Dots is a sentiment and emotion analysis software that uses ‘deep learning’ algorithms to ascribe positive, neutral, and negative sentiments in textual data, and can also detect the prevalence of six different emotions (Happy, Angry, Excited, Sad, Fear, Bored). The combination of these algorithmic tools with nuanced qualitative interpretations allows the researcher to present a wholistic analysis of dominant themes and patterns in large bodies of text. More detailed descriptions of methodological approaches are included in each chapter.

The overall structure of the dissertation is outlined here; Following the introduction, Chapter II provides survey and analysis of relevant literature, Chapter III explores and analyzes the dominant framing devices used in local television coverage of the opioid crisis in New Hampshire, Chapter IV examines images and discourses to three prominent opioid analgesic poisoning cases in the Merrimack Valley, Chapter V investigates the dominant discursive themes in several dozen speeches delivered by Jeff Sessions during his short tenure as Attorney General, and Chapter VI provides concluding remarks and offers directions for future research.

In chapter II, scholarly contributions to the intersectional theorization of ideology, race, class, gender, and political economy, are considered and evaluated. This review of literature

situates the current project within the intellectual tradition fomented by Stuart Hall and his counterparts at the Birmingham School, including its roots in classical political economy and its theoretical entanglements with post-Marxists perspectives offered by Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci. Additionally, the concept of ‘whiteness’ is interrogated from various historical, theoretical and critical perspectives, including how the ideology of whiteness intersects with the political formations of authoritarian populism, and the complex material, psychic, and emotional conditions that have contributed to dramatic rise in so-called “deaths of despair.” Finally, Hall et al.’s (1978) *Policing the Crisis* is presented as a practical, theoretical, and methodological framework, roadmap, and guide for examining the opioid crisis in the unique specificity of the Merrimack Valley. Ultimately, it is concluded that logic of moral panics advanced by Hall et (1978) in *Policing the Crisis* must be *inverted* to understand the dominant contemporary discourses about the opioid crisis in this context.

In Chapter III, the various ways in which the opioid crisis in New Hampshire is framed by the news media, is investigated through review of archival records, evaluation of political discourses in campaign materials, and analysis of closed captions from the WMUR news network. This chapter attempts to bring critical awareness to the various ways in which New Hampshire’s opioid crisis is represented as a social reality. By employing facets of the conjunctural analysis methodology utilized by Hall et al. (1978) this chapter also attempts to map out the complexities of the opioid crisis, as it plays out through dynamic interactions between the state, the press, the public and the judiciary. All of these factors are considered in context of the unique geopolitical specificity of New Hampshire, in the politically tense period leading up to the 2016 presidential election. Under these exceptional conditions, an intersectional understanding to race, class, gender, and politics is crucial, and accordingly

this chapter attempts to evaluate how news representations of the opioid crisis reflect, reinforce, and/or challenge socioeconomic, racial, gendered political realities in local, regional and national contexts.

Chapter IV examines the textual and visual rhetoric of the war on opioid addiction in the Merrimack Valley region that connects New Hampshire and Massachusetts, by evaluating statements and images produced and circulated by various local and national actors, including the media, the police, and policymakers. The dramatic rise in opioid abuse in the Merrimack Valley has been accompanied by a growing ‘moral panic’, which has increasingly taken on racial dimensions, and is reflected in public discourses, policy actions, as well as policing practices on the ground. In this socio-geographical context and in context of the insights provided by Stuart Hall, Stanley Cohen and other scholars who have examined previous ‘moral panics’, this chapter attempts to map out the complex interplay between the news media, law enforcement, and policymakers in producing, circulating, amplifying, and sustaining public anxiety about the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley and beyond. Drawing from Stuart Hall’s seminal work, *Policing the Crisis: The State, Mugging and Law and Order*, this chapter seeks to cultivate greater knowledge of how contemporary discourses about race and class, generated by law enforcement, policymakers, and citizens are circulated and amplified through media coverage of opioid overdoses as well as the illicit distribution and use of opioids.

By tracking and analyzing images and text related to three high-profile cases involving opioid overdose in the Merrimack Valley, this chapter attempts to explain how discourses about deviancy and threats to social order are produced, constructed, and circulated online. The first case is centered on Mandy McGowan of Salem New Hampshire, whose overdose in

a Family Dollar store in Lawrence Massachusetts was recorded on a cell phone and spread virally across social media and subsequently received intense coverage by regional and national news networks. The second image is part of a group of photos memorializing Courtney Griffin of New Hampshire, whose fatal overdose at the age of 20, sparked regional and national discussions about drug policy. The third image is a portrait of 11-year old Precious Wallaces, whose sudden death in Lawrence, MA, triggered a lengthy criminal investigation. Toxicology reports indicated that she had fentanyl in her system when she died, and investigators concluded that she was fatally drugged and raped by her great uncle. All of these stories are tragic reminders of the toll opioids have taken on communities in the Merrimack Valley, all received considerable media attention, and significantly, and all three of the victims are female (Mandy McGowan and Courtney Griffin are white, while Precious Wallace is Afro-Latina). While this study examines only three cases of opioid overdose in the Merrimack Valley there have been hundreds of similar incidents in recent history. The three cases were chosen, as they were most widely discussed in public forums, with all three cases featured in local and national news coverage.

Chapter V broadens the focus of inquiry to examine the prevailing opioid-related discourses in the judicial branch of the U.S. government. This is achieved through detailed content analysis of public speeches delivered by Jeff Sessions during his tenure as Attorney General, which lasted from February 9, 2017 to November 7, 2018. During this time period Sessions delivered 307 public speeches. All transcripts of public speeches given by the U.S. Attorney are published on the United States Department of Justice website ([www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov)). For the purpose of limiting the data set to speeches relevant to the topic of analysis, only speeches the containing the keyword “opioid” were selected. In all, there

were 70 speeches which included at least one reference to opioids, representing 22.8 percent of the total speeches delivered. The speeches of Attorney General were chosen as they are representative of the administration's early approach to drug and immigration policy (which are often intertwined) and set the tone for conduct and procedures of local, state, and federal police agencies for the years to come. Overall, it was found that Jeffrey Sessions' discourse about the opioid crisis served to advance a law and order approach to immigration, while providing few prosecutorial recommendations or legal opinions on the practices of the pharmaceutical companies, widely known to have fueled the opioid crisis.

This analysis demonstrates that strategic portrayals of drugs, addiction, treatment, and justice can frame the opioid crisis to advance particular policy agendas. Bringing the cultural production of discourse and imagery by journalists and politicians into focus, we can begin to gain a better understanding of the dominant representational strategies utilized to depict the crisis. Starting with the premise that discourse is never divorced from the material—that reality is always mediated by symbolic interaction—we can also attempt to chart the relationship between representation and realities on the ground. For example, we might examine the relationship between policing practices and the fact that opioid abuse is increasingly labeled as a public health issue, rather than a criminal one.

Before we begin in this endeavor, however, it is vital to put the opioid crisis in context. The United States is in the midst of the deadliest drug crisis in its history, and there are no clear signs that the crisis is slowing. Overdose deaths involving an opioid rose from 8,048 in 1999 to 47,600 in 2017 (Scholl et al., 2019, Jan 4). To put these numbers into perspective, the death toll from the opioid epidemic, in the first two years of the Trump Administration, surpassed the number of U.S. service members killed in the entire Vietnam war (Humphries,

2018, Jun 7). Opioids however are only one of the causes of an overall increase in mortality rates—dramatic increases in mortality rates have also been documented for other self-destructive behaviors such as alcoholism and suicide (Scutchfield and Keck, 2017). Significantly, increases in this classification of mortality, commonly referred to as “deaths of despair,” have been especially pronounced in white populations. The following section looks into some of the possible explanations and based on empirical data it is determined that insecurities around white identity are at least a factor—the same factor that was key to Trump’s insurgent rise.

### **B. Deaths of Despair**

A Brookings Institute study published in 2017 found that an overall increase in mortality rate among whites could be attributed to drug overdoses, suicide, and alcohol-related liver mortality, or so called “deaths of despair” (Case and Deaton, 2017). These trends are supported across the literature. Gennuso et al. (2017) found that premature death rates had declined in 39 out of 48 subpopulations, and all 9 subpopulations with increased death rates were non-Hispanic whites, largely outside of large urban areas, with the increase attributable to “self-destructive health behaviors” (p. 1541). With opioid overdoses largely to blame, a CDC study found that in 2016 the mortality rate of young whites increased for the first time since the mid-1960’s—at the height of the Vietnam War (Scholl et al., 2019, Jan 4).

It has also been established that mortality rates are rising for whites without a college degree and falling for whites with a college degree. For both white men and women 25-60 with no more than a high school degree, mortality rates increased every year between 1998 and 2015. The rising mortality rates among whites cannot be explained as part of a larger international trend as similarly wealthy countries (Germany, France, Canada, the UK, and

Australia) have all been experiencing declining mortality rates. Yet in the U.S., rising white mortality rates can be explained at least partially by changes in economic factors, including income (Case and Deaton, 2017). According to Case and Deaton (2017), when looking at middle-aged white population, “Mortality and income match closely” (p. 421). The authors of the Brookings Institute study found that from 1990 to 2015 there was a strong correlation between mortality for middle aged whites and median real household income per-person. For blacks and Hispanics with both high and low educational attainment, meanwhile, mortality rates have continued on a downward trend. In fact, for blacks, mortality rates have decreased at a rate of 2 to 3 percent from 1990-2015. While overall household incomes for blacks, whites and Hispanics rose and fell at similar rates between 1990 and 2015, changes in income only appear to correlate with mortality rates of middle-aged whites. The differential in mortality rates between whites, blacks and Hispanics rules out a purely economic explanation (Case and Deaton, 2017). As the authors explain, “we are left with no explanation for why blacks and Hispanics are doing so well” (p. 424). Similarly, Scutchfield and Keck (2017) observe, “White, middle- aged, undereducated, rural residents are experiencing a substantial increase in mortality related to self-destructive behavior as opposed to others in different geographical, educational, and racial groups. The question is, why?” (p. 1565). There, of course is no simple answer, but serious inquiry is required to understand the factors contributing to increasing mortality rates amongst whites, which leads us to raise several of our own questions. What is causing whites to engage in self-destructive behavior? If economic factors alone cannot explain the rising mortality rates among whites (largely attributable to “deaths of despair”) what are other possible explanations? We can

begin to arrive at some possible answers, it is argued here, through an exploration of ideology and identity, and in particular the crisis of white identity.

Thus, in order to make sense of the recent surge in deaths of despair it is vital to understand how white identity has shifted over the last few decades. But first several salient trends should be noted. It has been found that a substantial increase in psychological distress among whites with a high school education or less has been associated with increased risk of mortality from drug poisoning, suicide, or liver disease. Also, most likely to die prematurely are whites living in rural counties aged 45 to 55 and overall the increases in mortality rates are more precipitous in rural and small metro areas, with the risk of death increasing 40% to 50% in rural as opposed to suburban counties (Scutchfeld and Keck, 2017, p.1564). This tells us that the populations most at risk are rural and suburban middle age whites, and whites with low educational attainment experiencing psychological distress. Rural and suburban white populations, particularly in the Midwest, Appalachia and New England have been facing years of deagrarianization, urban migration, deindustrialization, the gutting of American manufacturing through automation and cheap foreign labor, stagnant wages, rising debt and growing income inequality. As Scoones (2018) contends, “Forms of dislocation, prolonged and widespread neglect, challenges to identity and the undermining of rural communities and livelihoods have been documented widely, from the US” (p. 8).

The resulting economic disenfranchisement and social marginalization have disintegrated traditional familial and community ties, lead to social exclusion, and a fracturing of a once relatively stable identity: The white working class. The following section will explore how whiteness has been constructed and can be understood as an ideology. Though not uniform in expression, and full of contradictory meanings, working



class whiteness can be understood through the examination of rituals and practices, shared histories, and economies, which can help to explain the recent spate in mortalities among specific segments of the white population. Using the political economic and cultural theories of Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, and Hall we explore divergent approaches to understanding ideology and identity. Drawing from Marx's base/superstructure metaphor we also examine materialism and economic determinism as applied to the production of media, culture, and ideology, and incorporate definitions of materialism that extend beyond purely economic terms to understand how exchange value is extracted through the production of cultural artifacts and forms. Marx's foundational work on ideology and false consciousness found in the seminal text *Capital* were formative in mapping out early understandings of the relationship between the state, capitalism, media and culture. Gramscian notions of hegemony, are also central to understandings of how power can function not only through direct coercion by the state, but through the soft powers of culture.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Marx and Ideology

The construction of whiteness as an ideology is often associated with the historical periods of enlightenment and colonialism, and while worthy of academic consideration, this section will be concerned with how white identity takes shape through the birth of modern capitalism, globalization, neoliberalism, and beyond.

An examination of early capitalism and ideology would not be complete without consideration of Marx's contributions to the critique of political economy. Marxist political economic theory was formulated from examining the white working class' relation to labor in the industrial period and is often critiqued for employing a Eurocentric analysis that portrays white ruling class ideology as representing *all* ideology.

For Marx (1970), ideology is an expression of the ruling ideas of the ruling class and is sustained through dominant material relations of production. The Base/Superstructure metaphor outlined by a young Marx in *German Ideology* (1845) and a *Contribution to the critique of Political Economy* (1859) provide the early contours of his theory of ideology. In a dramatic reversal of Hegelian dialectics, in which political-ideological determines the economic, Marx's theory of ideology has material relations exerting unidirectional influence over political-ideological forms, with productive forces determining the parameters of discourse and practices, *a priori*. or in the 'first instance'. Marx (1976 [1859]) in the declares in the Preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, it is material conditions and the, "totality of these forces of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to

which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness" (p. 3). Ideology and by extension conceptions of race and identity, as articulated by the early, Marx, are expressed exclusively on the plane of the superstructure and are always predetermined by the economic base—through both the means of production (material conditions) and relations of production (how society structures exchanges).

Through the obfuscation of exploitative relations of production that generate surplus value for owners, members of the proletariat and working class are prevented from truly understanding the ensconced nature of their own subjugation, leading to what Marx has referred to as “false consciousness.” The rendering of false conceptions amongst workers, allows the dominant ideology to pervade practices and discourse—most prominently the idea that capitalist modes of production will necessarily provide ‘equal opportunity for all’. Marx and Engels open the preface of *German Ideology*, with the proclamation “Hitherto, men have made for themselves false conceptions about who they are and who they ought to be,” – advancing the notion that ruling class ideology prevails from a systematic ‘veiling’ of the truth. Reading early Marx, one can find a theory of political economy in which ideology is preconfigured by economic relations and can be sustained by obfuscating the true nature of these relations.

### **1. Marx and White Despair**

If we are to examine recent surges in white mortality rates from a materialist perspective, we might arrive at the conclusion that an emergent ideology of ‘white despair’ necessarily arises from economic conditions, specifically the gutting of manufacturing jobs, increasing debt and financialization of markets, deagrarianization, growing income inequality, and other economic factors affecting the white working class. While we should emphasize the role of

material conditions in producing despair, the economic cannot act as the sole determining factor. As established previously, consistently dropping mortality rates have been documented among Black and Hispanic populations, which historically have experienced poorer economic conditions than whites (Scutchfield and Keck, 2017). Persistent and systematic wealth inequality between whites and minority groups has been well documented, and recent studies have concluded that this wealth gap only widened after the “great recession” (Hanks, Solomon, and Weller, 2019). Overall, populations hardest hit by the recession were young and middle age families, non-college educated individuals, and African-Americans and Hispanics (Emmons and Noeth, 2012). Given this reality we might expect to see relatively consistent changes in mortality rates across all of these sections of the population, but that simply is not the case. Classical materialism, though fundamental to how we think about the relationship between the economic and the ideological does not offer a complete explanation, and thus requires more expansive theorization of Marxist principles.

Generations of scholars working in the tradition of political economy are indebted profoundly to the contributions of Marx, with hundreds of publications dedicated to theorizing the relationship between ideology, culture, the state, and the economic, from a Marxist perspective. Premised in critiques of reductionism within the historical materialist approach—chiefly the over-determinant role of the economic—many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars working in the Marxist tradition began the difficult work of rethinking classical Marxism. Marxist theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, and scholars working at Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools—most notably Stuart Hall—have proposed radical re-configurations of historical materialism to map out the complicated and interdeterminant relationships between the economic, culture, ideology and the state.

## **B. Gramsci and Hegemony**

Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci, sometimes called the “father of Cultural Marxism” is best known for promulgating early alternatives to the economic determinism found in traditional Marxist political theory. The posthumous publication of *The Prison Notebooks*, a condensed collection of hundreds of notes written during his imprisonment by Mussolini’s Fascist regime, has had a sustaining influence on radical cultural and political theory, with Gramsci’s concept of “cultural hegemony” being perhaps the most penetrating. As a political prisoner for more than 10 years, Gramsci (1971) understood profoundly the power of the state to preserve social order through direct intimidation and coercion, as well as its ability to crush oppositional ideologies with brutal force. But he also understood, perhaps more profoundly, that power cannot be sustained through domination alone (what Gramsci calls *political society*)—it can also exert itself through culture and practices (what Gramsci calls *civil society*). The dominant ideology, for Gramsci, permeates everyday rituals and practices, such that culture becomes an invisible apparatus of domination. The power of hegemony, as Gramsci, terms it, is derived not from direct coercion, physical domination, military force, or state power, but through the soft powers of culture. Neither force nor intimidation are necessary if the common population has aligned itself with dominant cultural values and accepted them as *common sense*. As “natural” and “common sense,” hegemony initially appears to have emerged without struggle. Yet, as Croteau and Hoynes (2003) explain, “Ultimately Gramsci saw hegemony as a daily struggle about our underlying conceptions of the world, a struggle always subject to revision and opposition (pp. 168-169). Hegemony, therefore, does not exist without challenges to its continued formation—in fact the opposite—it is a site of constant ideological struggle. Although the hegemon thoroughly

privileges the dominant ideology, there are always, however large or small, possibilities for counter-hegemonic expressions of resistance. The impulse of the ruling class is to absorb any counterhegemonic cultural form into its dominant frame, but resistance is possible nonetheless. Ideology for Gramsci is the terrain of struggle—constant negotiation and renegotiation between dominant ruling ideas and counterhegemonic forms—though the dominant order usually supersedes and prevails.

For Gramsci there are a range of contradictory and counterhegemonic forms that are available to draw from, but ultimately the ruling capitalist class and bourgeoisie ideology set the establishing parameters. The economic system of capitalism, therefore does not exert unidirectional control over ideology, it does not provide the content of thoughts or prefigure actions in any preordained order, but does set the range of possible choices, and thus limits the range of available perspectives. While Gramsci's concept of hegemony is firmly based in Marxist thinking, culture plays a much larger role and is not determined purely by the economic. Hegemony operates through consent and it is therefore dependent upon an agreement with ideological subjects—not an immediate reflex to existing relations of production—but rather through enactments of culture.

### **1. The White Hegemon**

Civil and political society in the United States has long been delimited by a dominant white standard—a standard which persistently pervades and permeates discourse, ideology, culture, and institutions. For centuries the white ruling class has maintained its hegemony in the United States, economically, cultural, and politically. From slavery, to mass incarceration, white hegemony has always faced contestation, but only to preserve its enduringly dominant position. With the reality of a white minority quickly approaching and

increasing economic distress in white communities, however, anxiety over the decline of white hegemony has begun to surface—observed in the openly racist rhetoric of Donald Trump, the dramatic growth of white supremacist movements, and the precipitous rise in hate crimes. Concomitantly, the proliferation of white identity politics and cooptation of civil rights discourse in some white supremacist movements (Matias and Newlove, 2017) hail the expression of white identity as a form of resistance against an imaginary hegemony governed by a multiculturalist and pluralist agenda.

## **2. Black Optimism/White Despair**

Grievances expressed by whites have been labeled by black commenters on social media with the phrase, or hashtag “white tears,” meaning, “...white complaints about the difficulties they encounter, oblivious to the enormous privilege they wield and oblivious to the difficulties and order of magnitude more grave faced by Blacks...” (Lloyd, 2016, p. 178). White tears can be seen as emanating from what Lloyd refers to as a “simulacrum of despair,” meaning that the despair of whites is referentially empty—it exists only rhetorically and is fundamentally discordant with the experience of white privilege. For Lloyd sincere despair, “requires whites to become Black (and poor)” (p, 179)—to relinquish their privilege entirely, and this of course is impossible. White despair, and by extension, white tears, for Lloyd, are performative and in themselves an expression of white privilege.

Those tears are themselves a re-assertion of privilege, a performance of privilege. Social scripts dictate that crying people, especially crying white people, and most especially crying white women must be comforted. To comfort usually means to apologize, or to say that you really did not mean to offend, or that every- thing will be alright—each of these a reaffirmation of white supremacy. How, then, are whites to despair? (p.178)

The question, “How, then are whites to despair?” functions rhetorically to connect “white despair” to white privilege and by extension, white hegemony. The appropriate question to follow is: If expressions of “white despair,” serve as discursive strategies for obfuscating and denying white privilege, do ‘deaths of despair’ serve this same rhetorical function? This question cannot be answered easily and requires interrogation of many factors, but we can begin by ruling out reductionist and deterministic explanations. The ideology of despair and the spate of deaths attributed to it, cannot be seen simply as reflex to worsening economic conditions for non-urban whites. Much research has demonstrated that living in poverty doesn’t necessarily lead to poverty of the spirit demonstrated by the fact that poor blacks on average score 1.4 points higher than poor whites on the optimism scale (Case and Deaton, 2017). It is argued here that an understanding of mounting despair among whites can be understood at least partially by examining the interactions between material conditions, ruling class ideology, and the superstructural realm of identity and culture, through a Gramscian lens.

To make sense of the mounting despair among whites, from a Gramscian perspective, it is necessary to understand Antonio Gramsci’s own experience of subjugation, especially with regard to what he called the “the Southern question.” Gramsci, having descended from the island of Sardinia, which “stood in a ‘colonial’ relationship with the mainland,” (p. 416) occupied a position of economic and cultural subjectivity, and Gramsci drew from this experience to inform his intellectual understanding of power. This understanding, influenced by Gramsci’s observations on the uneven relationship between Italy’s industrialized North and the economically dependent South, was not only informed by class difference, but also inequity in cultural and political relations. In retrospective examination of Gramsci’s



illumination of Southern Italy's economic, cultural and political dependency, we can extract a kind of pre-Subaltern perspective—one that recognizes the function of oppressive forces beyond the relations of production. At the same time, Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony—a direct response to “economism,” or the reductionist principle that the base is the “only determining structure”—opens Marxist analysis to articulations on many levels between the economic, political, and ideological.

Like Sardinia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rural and small-town America occupies increasingly, a subjugated position in relation to the ruling capitalist class concentrated in large American cities. Widening wealth gaps, the gutting of American manufacturing, and wage stagnation, have exposed the hegemonic ideology of the American dream to scrutiny and resistance, while the white working and middle class' diminishing influence in society has produced palpable anxiety and hopelessness. Gramsci, however, facing grave illness, and lengthy imprisonment by a Fascist government, maintained an optimistic spirit, encapsulated by the oft quoted avowal, “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” Gramsci's life, though just one illustration spawned from very specific historical, political and cultural configurations, may offer useful lessons about how hope and despair function relative to power. As a ‘colonial subject’ in Sardinia, Gramsci experienced subalternity in a way that white Americans, as part of the dominant hegemonic order, cannot claim. The intensely uneven relation between the North and South produced for Gramsci a certain pessimism and profound understanding of despair, but at the same time provided inspiration for resistance, resilience and optimism. Gramscian notions of pessimism and optimism have been applied to the black experience by prominent Black scholars including Franz Fanon and Stuart Hall. For others, however, including Frank B. Wilderson III (2003), Gramscian theory is

incommensurable with the black experience. This perspective emanates from critiques about the complete absence of black subjects in the *Prison Notebooks*, an inability to offer the same antagonisms of ‘unwaged slavery’ deployed toward ‘waged slavery,’ and the refusal to acknowledge how black bodies have acted as *capital* to form *the economic base* of capitalism (Hart, 2018). From these critiques of Gramscian Marxism grew calls to advance the ontologies of ‘Afro-pessimism’ and ‘black optimism,’ representing, “competing responses to antiblackness” (Hart, 2018, p. 16). Afro-pessimism exists as corollary against American capitalism, built on the abjection of black lives and the exploitation of enslaved black labor, and thus firmly ensconced in anti-black racism. Afro-pessimism, as delineated by Frank B. Wilderson III (2003) is an ontological response to social conditions that have reduced black people to objects existing in adversarial opposition to ‘humanity, and in constant subjection to epistemic violence, rendering, “blackness as social death.” As Hart (2018) explains,

Afro-pessimists see the present order of things as radically antiblack, as constitutively incapable of apprehending the humanity of black people. On this view, blackness is isomorphic with abjection. Blackness is what whiteness throws out; treats as aboriginal trash; the normative trashiness against which that abnormality called white trash is imagined (Hart, 2018, p.17).

Afro-Pessimism, thus activates tacit recognition of the intrinsic cruelty of the black experience, as inevitably converse to experiences of whiteness and white privilege. Similarly, Lloyd (2016) sees despair as an ontological reality of blackness, incommensurable with experiences of white privilege.

Formal instruction in despair is unnecessary for the marginalized and oppressed; life offers us plenty of opportunities to learn about despair naturally, as it were. The policeman stops us for no reason, or the underfunded bus system makes us perpetually late for work and costs us our job, or the only grocery store in the neighborhood moves to the suburbs. In contrast, privilege mutes despair. It prevents situations from

occurring that might give rise to despair and it reduces the severity of those situations that do arise (p. 179).

Black optimism, a term often attributed to Fred Moten, on the other hand, “manifests as an operation, a performance against a perdurant antiblackness” (p.24). Black Optimism/Operations can be seen as direct action against anti-black racism, steeped in histories of black resistance from slave revolts, to the civil rights movement to the recent demonstrations against police killings of unarmed black men. Though Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism are often seen as divergent ontologies, The Black Lives Matter movement has activated aspects of both. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was dispatched online to voice proclamations of black humanity against the callous disregard for black lives, and for organizing street protests against police killings of black people. The proliferation of the hashtag #AllLivesMatter as an attempt to eviscerate realities of systemic anti-blackness, meanwhile validates Afro-pessimists’ assertion that whites are incapable of understanding how subjugation and dehumanization are inseparable from the black experience in America. Street protests in Ferguson and Baltimore and many other U.S. cities organized by Black Lives Matter activists are also manifestations of Black Optimism that, “allow blackness to live in spite of ever-present death” (Linscott, 2017, p. 113).

To understand ‘white despair’ we must examine it relationally to Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism, and ultimately, to Gramscian theory. Black Optimism/Operations can describe both a subjective emotion of hope, and as a will for political intervention/change, as direct anti-racist, counterhegemonic action, while Afro-pessimism can describe intellectual interrogation of white hegemony. The pessimism and despair of the white underclass, however triggers a very different impulse—a desperate thrust to maintain the dominant order

of white hegemony. The response from large segments of the disgruntled white underclass, was to blame a racialized ‘other’ for economic and social grievances, rather than interrogate neoliberal policies that have facilitated massive wealth transfers to the ‘one percent’ (Reid, 2016). Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) doctrine utilized many aspects of the ‘white victimhood’ narrative grounded in the idea that “weakness or vulnerability is the fault of maligned others” (Reid, 2016, p. 94). This doctrine resonated with large segments of the white working class, and this population of voters has been credited commonly for carrying Trump’s 2016 victory, especially in the blue-collar states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania (Morgan and Lee, 2018). Many political pundits on the left were perplexed by the working-class appeal of Trump’s Make America Great Again brand, characterized by bombastic anti-immigrant, populist rhetoric, failing to apprehend how Trump’s insurgent popularity was being carried by a wave of deep anxieties about a waning white hegemony. Delivering promises of salvation from ‘despair’, Trump represents what Reid (2016) has called a “Capitalist Folk Hero.” With slogans like ‘Make America Great Again’ and ‘America First,’ Trump pledges to restore the mythical greatness of America’s past—one where white hegemony remains staunch and uncontested. Simultaneously, the Trump doctrine offers a panacea to the plights of the working class; savage free-market capitalism. As such, ruling class ideas and the same neoliberal economic order that has produced systematic inequalities are presented as the cure for ‘white despair’ rather than the cause of it. The ideology of ‘white despair’ therefore is constructed through ‘common sense’ acceptance of hegemony.

Gramscian explanations may offer a theoretical framework for explaining ‘white despair; and the discourse around it, but the question remains; why is this despair literally killing

white Americans by the thousands? Making sense of why “White despair” has been killing white people necessitates an examination of a complex conjuncture produced at a moment of dynamic frictions between economic, ideological, cultural, political and social forces. Pure economic explanations are incomplete, as post-Marxist scholars, including Antonio Gramsci have articulately demonstrated. Critiques and re-envisioning of Gramscian theory by structuralists, post-colonial scholars, critical cultural theorists meanwhile have produced important interventions for understanding how race influences ideology, identity and real conditions of existence. The following section will explore how Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and others have built upon the political and economic theory of Marx and Gramsci to advance understandings of the role of race, ideology and culture—theoretical orientations which have profound implication for how we make sense of ‘white despair.’

### C. Althusser

Louis Althusser (1971), born in French-held Algeria as a colonial subject, and like Gramsci, imprisoned for his dissident views, has made indelible advancements to Marxist social and political theory. Althusser rejects reductionist readings of Marx’s base/superstructure metaphor that place the economic as the singularly determining force, referencing Freidrich Engels’ 1890 letter to Bloch, which contains the following cautionary:

...According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views, and their

further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction between all these elements... (Engels, September 21, 1890, p. 682)

Engels, who was set up with the difficult task of posthumously contextualizing Marx's extensive body of literature, accepts some blame for underplaying the interdeterminant relationship between base and superstructure and the "tendency to reduce everything to the economic" (p. 682). Attempting to clarify his own and Marx's position on determinacy, Engels describes the "innumerable intersecting forces," which mediate complex interactions between the economic and the ideological. Irrespective of the interdeterminant relationship between the social and economic, for Engels, "The economic ones are ultimately decisive" (p.682), and in end, "*The economic movement finally asserts itself*" (p. 682). This is what Althusser (1969) has referred to as, "determination in the last instance"—that it is, "always the base which in the last instance determines the edifice" (Althusser, 1969, p.111). The rendering of a totality made up of a complex contradictions and unities between the economic and ideological allows for contradictions, but in the end for Engels and Althusser, without the economic foundation—the base—the domain of the superstructure would collapse.

In Marx's inversion of Hegelian dialectics, Althusser also sees, contrary to popular readings, multiple levels of determination—rather than just one (the economic). Reproaches of dialectical materialism often focus on the reductionisms of economic 'overdetermination,' but as Althusser counters, "a Hegelian contradiction is never really overdetermined." Althusser stresses the mutual influences and contradictions between opposites that exist in a dialectic—in any system the economic and the ideological form part of a concrete unity, fashioned interdependently across dual levels of determination. For Althusser the

consequences of historical contradictions are never predetermined and can even coalesce in unpredictable ways to produce ‘ruptural’ moments in which the established ideological/economic settlement becomes destabilized. As Althusser (2005) explains,

...to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of ‘circumstances’ and ‘currents’ so that whatever their origin and sense (and many of them will *necessarily* be paradoxically foreign to the revolution in origin and sense, or even its ‘direct opponents’), they ‘fuse’ into a *ruptural unity*: when they produce the result of the immense majority of the popular masses *grouped* in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are *unable to defend* (p. 99). [emphasis in original text]

The fusing of complex conjunctures within base and superstructure, therefore can produce ‘ruptural’ moments which overturn the established ruling class order. In the end, however, as Althusser (2005) has repeated, the economic becomes decisive. For example, in Althusser’s analysis of the Russian Revolution, there was confluence of contradictions and articulations between social-historical forces of feudalism, and the economic forces of capitalism, and Communism, but ultimately for Althusser, the “unevenness of capitalist development led, via the 1914-1918 War, to the Russia Revolution...” (Hall, 1985, p.97).

In the face of potential ‘ruptures,’ Althusser (1971) argues that the ruling class attempts to preserve the dominant social order through two instruments of power: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). RSA’s operate through state bodies and institutions such as the military, prisons and governments, but for Althusser, like Gramsci before him, the dominant social order cannot be fully maintained through hard power alone (i.e. direct coercion or force). Instead, willful identifications must be made with the dominant social order through the soft powers of culture and discourse, which emanate through and from ISA’s, or civil institutions that have legal standing, including churches, schools, the family, courts political parties, the media, unions, sports, and the arts.

In a departure from Marx's notion of *false consciousness*—that we simply do not understand our relationship to labor—Althusser suggests that ideology operates through willful identification with bourgeois ideals. Whereas in classical Marxism, ideology arises from a false conception of reality designed to conceal one's relationship to the real world (i.e. the *hidden abode of production*), Althusser argues ideology results from an “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” Ideology formation according to Althusser corresponds to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the ‘Imaginary Order’—as a discursive structure of consciousness in which we are born into and recognize intrinsically within us and around us. Like the infant who develops conscientiousness through recognition of his or herself in Lacan's Mirror Stage, the individual becomes an ideological subject through recognition and active identification with structures of discourse. The process through which individuals are made into ideological subjects, for Althusser, is illustrated through what he calls “interpellation” or “hailing.” When a police officer hails a subject/suspect- i.e. “Hey you there,” the subject tacitly recognizes his/her subjugated relation to power and accepts it as natural. In this simple act, there is an essential recognition of ideology and the subjects' relationality to it. As Althusser (1971) has proclaimed “All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects.”

### **1. Whiteness as Discourse**

With these perspectives on ideology, we must ask, what can Althusser's theory of interpellation teach us about race, and in particular white despair? From an Althusserian perspective, although race and racism have ‘real’ effects, race in itself does not exist in the realm of the ‘real,’ but instead comes into being by way of the symbolic and discursive. Whiteness,



therefore is a discursive formation—one is not born ‘white’ but becomes ‘white’ through recognition and active identification with discourses of whiteness. Whiteness of course, exists in opposition to what it is not: Blackness. As such, the ideology of race is activated by racial discourses, which in turn produce real subjectivities. As Leonardo (2005) explains,

The ideology of race and its concomitant discourses interpellate every human individual into the racial formation. He/she is signified and brought into the racial universe, which gives him/her a racial label, White or otherwise. Of course, this is not a literal process of hailing someone down the street, but an unconscious hailing that is part of self-recognition, or misrecognition to be more precise. Once the hailing begins and provides racialized subjects with their identity, it never fails to record the response ‘Here I am!’ This process does not yet speak to the eventual goal of eradicating race, which is a possibility, but points to the difficult task of countering racial identification. (p.407)

Though race is not ‘real’ in that it emerges only through processes of signification in which individuals are hailed as racialized subjects, race and racism cannot be disentwined from material realities. Racialized discourses organize and inform institutional practices through schools, families, and prisons or what Leonardo (2005) calls the ‘Racial State Apparatus’ (RSA). Racism as a system of hierarchical ranking based on skin color, is also a patently white invention—one that brings into existence new subjectivities and categories of identification within an imaginary racial order (Leonardo, 2005). The rhetoric of white despair and white victimhood, fascinatingly, perform the discursive function of flipping the conventional ideology of racism, such that whites are hailed as subjects of unfair treatment from immigrants, Muslims, other minority groups, and the multicultural institutions that serve them. This exemplifies another white invention: anti-White racism. But at the same time, the subjectivities experienced by poor whites as a result of uneven capitalist development have produced real material inequalities. In this sense, white despair can both a discourse and a material reality, and therefore must be examined as an articulation produced

at dual levels, by the superstructure and the base—corresponding to the Althusserian concept of double articulation—that economic and the ideological interact dialectically and are inter-determinant.

#### **D. Critical Cultural Studies**

Others working in the tradition of the Birmingham School, such as Hall, Williams, Hebdige, Lewis and Jhally also formed intellectual positions that went beyond classical materialist approaches to political economy of communication to examine the complex interactions between base economics, media, and ideologies associated with culture, race, gender and class. For Raymond Williams (1980) the problem with Marx's views on overdetermination is a problem of translation. Williams (1980) takes Marx's original term for determination, *Bestimmen*, and deconstructs it semantically. The term could represent a force that prefigures or exerts unidirectional control but also could be used to describe something that sets parameters, which would put it much more in the realm of Gramsci's and Althusser's orientation towards determination. *Überbau*, the German word for superstructure can also be translated as "mediation," which would suggest more interaction with the *Grundlag* or base. Williams therefore advances a re-reading of Marx that allows for diversity and contradiction, but within the establishing parameters set by the economic, and therefore it is in the 'last instance' that the economic asserts itself—a position that is echoed by other post-Marxist scholars, such as Althusser.

Raymond Williams (1980) also borrows Gramsci's concept of hegemony in his analysis of subcultures and class in the UK. Subcultures, for Williams (1980) represent 'emergent' and contradictory forms, which challenge the hegemony of the dominant culture. 'Residual

forms', or practices and beliefs from a previous social formation are perennially tested by emergent forms, or new expressions, meanings and practices. The dominant hegemonic ideological structures will tolerate emergent forms, but Williams (1980) argues that efforts will always be made to incorporate them into the existing social order, which Hebdige has demonstrated quite profoundly in his analysis of the British street gangs in the post war period, most notoriously the Mods, Rockers, and Teddy Boys. For Hebdige, the emergent subcultures of Mods, Rockers, and Teddy Boys, and the intermittent outburst of violent intergroup conflict, posed an existential threat to the dominant class structure of 1950's England, generating a 'moral panic' amongst politicians, law enforcement, and media outlets. At the same time, however, these subcultures express dominant working-class values, and are coopted and usurped into the broader ideological structure of capitalism. Counter-hegemonic ideology is thus tolerated, but in the end the hegemon will incorporate emergent forms into its dominant structure.

As perhaps one of the most influential post-Marxist thinkers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Stuart Hall has made significant advancements to the theorization of political economy. Stuart Hall has the advantage of writing in posterity, and as such can build on already solid theoretical foundations laid by Marx, Althusser, Williams, and Gramsci. For Hall, understanding the Marxist critiques of political economy requires contextual and relational readings of Marx's extensive body of work that consider the material conditions of his existence and philosophical shifts as he matures intellectually. For Hall (1996) there are two Karl Marxes: The early Marx and the more mature Marx. Marx's early, less theoretically developed views on economic determinism can be found in *German Ideology* (1845) and the 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy*. In the 1859 preface, a young Marx,

observing the Mosselle peasantry, pronounces that it is the economic foundation, which determines their material conditions. Examining this early work, we can find a calcified historical materialism, from which it is presumed that all ideological-discursive forms are derivative of existing relations of production. However, for Hall, the economic determinism of Marx's early work, understood by many scholars simply as a contention that economic configurations exert unidirectional control over all social formations, must be considered relationally to later theoretical revisions, specifically in *Capital*. For instance, the notion that *false consciousness* arises from the systematic obfuscation of workers' exploitative relationship with labor, may imply, by inversion that there is a predetermined Truth 'out there'. But Hall is careful not to conflate *false consciousness*, with the idea that Marx, from his omniscient vantage point can perceive predetermined falsehoods, which the proletariat, in their subordinate relation to production, are unable to see. Rather than a result of a fixed, predetermined, "relationship between market exchange, and how it appropriated in thought," Hall (1996) argues that *false consciousness* arises from "one-sided explanations" "half-truths" and "distortions" of social reality, which are "systemically hidden" (p. 37). For example, Hall demonstrates that Marx's complimentary notion of the *Hidden abode of production*—the idea that material conditions of human labor are systemically obscured through capitalist modes of production—does not suggest that the market is an illusion, which has been stripped entirely of its True meaning. On the contrary, this suggests the market provides only "partial," "incomplete," "inadequate explanation of a process" (p.37). Hall traces Marx's intellectual development from the early Marx, often criticized for essentialism, historicism, and overdetermination to a more mature Marx, who might understand more intricate and nuanced articulations between base and superstructure. The

idea that the economic cannot “provide the contents of particular thoughts” and cannot “fix or guarantee” how ideas will be used by particular classes represents a dramatic break from the historical materialism thesis—that the economic asserts itself from the start—at *the first instance* (Hall, 1996, p.44).

Though Marxist thinking is foundational to Hall’s intellectual understanding of culture and ideology, Gramsci was perhaps most formative. In fact, Hall has often been referred to ‘a Gramscian’ rather than ‘a Marxist,’ highlighting his dedication to theorizing the complexities of the interrelations and contradictions between levels of determination. Although, as Hall (1996) explains, the theoretical genealogy of Gramsci’s ideas can be traced back to the classical Marxist tradition of materialism, his concepts of hegemony, and common sense operate within a Marxist paradigm that is “extensively revised” (p. 411). Gramsci’s concept of hegemony extends thinking beyond determination in the *first* or *last instance*, to explain a more multivariate, omni-directional, and contradictory set of determining factors, where there is “no necessary correspondence” to the economic. For Gramsci, hegemony does not assert itself in the first instance through class or state domination alone, it “encompasses the critical domain of cultural, moral and ethical leadership” (Hall, 1996, p.426). Although it is dominant bourgeois ideology, which often sets the establishing parameters, consent is not necessarily an immediate reflex of exploitative relations of production—it is enacted through the practice and reproduction of culture and civil society. In this configuration, dominant discursive frameworks are not preconditioned to exert control over counter-hegemonic discourses. It is a constant ideological struggle. This position corresponds with Hall’s notion of a “Marxism without guarantees”, or the idea that political and economic struggles are neither determined from the onset, nor confined to a

preordained outcome.

The ideological struggle between hegemonic and counterhegemonic social forces, is something that Hall (1996) quite perceptively observed in the rise of Thatcherite neoliberalism in post-war Britain. Hall (1996) observed how the rise of a new social configuration based in conservatism and neoliberalism required a common-sense agreement. This was achieved by appealing to something deep in the English psyche in a time of incredible social upheaval, marked by postcolonial immigration to the U.K. and a growing tide of xenophobia. For Hall, the specific historical, social, and class configurations that defined this moment could not be described by classical Marxist critiques of political economy alone. Ideology must be considered as a principle force, which for Hall is formed by complex interactions between cultural, racial, and economic factors.

According to Hall (1996), Gramsci was able to understand and conceptualize ideology within “specific historical conjunctures,” (p.415), which in large part is missing in Marx’s work. Specifically, Gramsci’s intellectual exploration of ideology has its origins in his own material conditions as a prisoner taken during the Mussolini Regime’s ascent into power. Hall (1992) observed how Gramsci’s ideas emerged in a specific historical reality, which ultimately led to his persecution and imprisonment by Mussolini’s fascist government. Though Mussolini’s power was concentrated through state apparatuses that made Gramsci’s imprisonment possible, there were dominant discourses and practices enacted to sustain social order, which Gramsci had emerged as an ideological threat to.

In very much the same way the Cultural Studies group and Hall’s (1996) own relationship with ideology are formulated within concrete circumstances, “within the specificity of historical conjectures” (p.163). Rather than contending with the rise of 20<sup>th</sup>

century Fascism, Hall and his contemporaries were grappling with the emergence of a new social configuration, which would come to be called Thatcherism—a new and radically different “common sense” view of the world. For Hall (1996), rather than provide the answers to the problem of race or class within the context of neoliberalism, Gramsci’s thoughts on ideology provide, “the means with which to ask the right kinds of questions about the politics of the 1980’s and 1990’s” (p.162). During this moment of postcolonial migration, and increasingly neoliberal economics, a critical conjuncture is forged through dynamic frictions between identity, ideology, economics which cannot be adequately understood through the lens of classical Marxist thought. Accordingly, Hall (1987: 1996) takes up the task of establishing undeveloped theoretical connections between Gramscian ideology and the realm of contemporary culture and race taken up by the New Left.

Though Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and common sense are particularly significant to Hall’s entrance into the intellectual terrain of race and ideology, like Marx before him, Hall (1996) explains, “Gramsci did not write about race, ethnicity or racism, in their contemporary meanings or manifestations” (p. 415). Though belonging to a tradition of ‘western Marxists’ who by placing disproportionate focus on modes of production in the economic center, often overlook the ideological power of race, Hall cannot simply dismiss Gramsci’s contributions as irrelevant to the study of the structures of racism, colonialism, and imperialism. So, although there are no explicit markings of the “problems of racism” in Gramsci’s life and work, Hall argues that “the preoccupying themes” can be left ‘open’ to engage in intellectual conversations with issues beyond material conditions, including contemporary race and class relations (Hall, 1996, p. 417), or what Hall describes as a “genuinely ‘open’ Marxism” (Hall, 1996, p. 412).

Also drawing from Gramsci, Hall (1996) describes how racism functions not only at the level of institutions and structures, but also on the level of common sense and hegemony, such that the victim often assumes, “the very racist ideologies that imprison and define them.” For Hall (1996), ideology operates on symbolic terrains, and always remains open to contestation, but usually privileges the residual dominant social order. The meaning of a particular racial category is never pre-given, with guarantees—it is always open to resistance. The association of criminality to blackness, for example has been actively tethered through processes of signification.

Althusser’s (1971) concept of hailing and interpolation are also integral to Hall’s understanding of ideology. For Hall (1996) identification with core aspects of English identity made the rise of Thatcherism possible—activated on appeals to a nostalgia for the old Britain, to “make Britain great again.” A tide of Postcolonial immigration awakened working class insecurities, the same way that Trump has appealed to the fears of the proletariat class through fiery rhetoric about jobs, immigration and white identity. For Hall, the rise of Thatcherism is much more about ideology and psychology than politics, and race is central to this ideological formation.

Althusser’s concept of articulation and contradiction are also formative to Hall’s understanding of the ‘ruptural’ political moment in Britain, when the old post-war social order is displaced by a new neoliberal ideological and economic configuration. Thatcherite politics arise not from a simple structural coordination of thought and behavior, but from complex and messy interactions between base and superstructure. Althusser’s (1963) concept of articulation, thus becomes important for understanding how race, class, geography and a confluence of other factors coalesced under specific circumstances in Britain in the late



1970's, 80's and 90's to produce an emergent ideological order. The rise of Thatcherism, thus, cannot be described through a simple class analysis—it must be considered as a 'rupture' from the old settlement, produced through complex interactions between multiple levels of determination.

Through Gramsci, Althusser, and others, Hall was able to find a Marxism that could explain the complexities of a British society in transition. With the social Welfare state of post-WWII Britain in decline, and Thatcherism and neoliberalism materializing into emergent orders, complex economic, political, and socio-cultural forces came into play, which could not be explained fully through the lens of classical Marxism—and Hall took up the intellectual project of mapping out the complex conjunctures that had coalesced to produce these emergent economic and ideological configurations.

Perhaps most substantially, Stuart Hall's and colleagues' (1972) seminal text, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State and Law and Order* generated unprecedented intellectual insight into how material and symbolic practices in post-war U.K. society helped to forge the emergent ideologies of Thatcherism and neoliberalism. Applying what he has termed a 'conjunctural analysis', Hall et al. (1978) showed how statements from various actors amplified threats to the social order, through their reproduction, circulation and delivery to various publics in the U.K. By investigating the racialized construction of 'folk devils' and 'moral panics' around the so-called 'mugging epidemic' in the U.K., from 1972-73, Hall et al. (1978) demonstrated profoundly how symbolic threats to English identity were communicated to the public. For Hall et al. (1978), it was not only the press that drove the circulation and amplification of messages about mugging, but also powerful actors, such as the police and the judiciary. As a metaphor for threats to English identity, the 'mugging

epidemic,’ for Hall et al. (1978) was a crucial symbolic force in the mobilization of anti-immigrant and populist sentiments that were central to the burgeoning Thatcherite social order. Through contemporary readings of *Policing the Crisis*, this review of literature provides a basis for understanding the complex historical, material, and symbolic and material practices that have contributed to the insurgent rise of authoritarian populism in the U.S. and the accompanying doctrines of ‘Make America Great Again’ and ‘America First’. Concomitantly, *Policing the Crisis* provides critical lessons for understanding how contemporary crises and threats to social order are constructed symbolically and communicated, circulated and appropriated by audiences.

### **1. Policing the Crisis**

In *Policing the Crisis* (PTC) Hall et al. (1978) show us how symbolic practices are constituted through the production, circulation and consumption of images and texts while being situated in concrete economic practices (an emergent Thatcherite neoliberalism). Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate not only how audiences appropriate and use texts to satisfy socio-cultural and psychological needs, (in this case to define the parameters of “Englishness” in a shifting cultural, economic and racial landscape), but also how these same messages constitute productive means to circulate symbolic capital that create identifications with the existing social order (and of course resistance).

PTC can be considered a work of rupture, in its break from the old academic settlement, including some intellectuals of the New Left for whom class formations and their relations of production constituted both the starting and ending point of analysis. Although PTC is recognizably Marxist in its preoccupation with materialism, historical particularities, and issues of social class, Hall et al. (1978) promulgate the idea of race being a central factor in

the analysis of phenomenology, which sets it apart from other early works in the tradition of Cultural Studies.

PTC is unique in its specificity and precision, focusing on cases of three “mixed boys” who received 20-year sentences for what had in the past been considered petty thefts. Employing a systematic examination of print news stories about mugging, and sentencing statements given by judges, and the police, Hall et al. (1978) set out to discover why young black men were being handed out harsh sentences for “mugging”—a crime previously constituted as petty theft. It must be noted here—as Hall et al. (1978) point out—the term, “mugger” was appropriated from American tabloids, by the press in the U.K. in the early 1970’s, and subsequently, deployed rhetorically by the police and the judiciary to describe petty thefts and robberies. Hall et al. (1978) trace the British arrival of the “mugger” archetype to an August 17, 1972 headline featured in the *Daily Mail*. The headline read, *'As Crimes of Violence Escalate, a Word Common In the United States Enters the British Headlines: Mugging. To our Police, it's a frightening new strain of crime.'* As Hall et al. (1978) point out, “...the word 'mugging', hitherto used almost exclusively in an American context, or to refer in very general terms to the general growth of crime in Britain; was affixed to a particular case, and entered the crime reporter's vocabulary” (p. 4). The natural questions that arise then are: How and why did a singularly American term, already loaded with racial connotations, get appropriated by U.K. crime dailies and subsequently inculcated into the discourse of the criminal justice system? For Hall et al. (1978), mugging never constituted a new strain of crime as the original headline suggests, for there were similar waves of street crime in the past that did not produce the same moral panic. Through analysis of hundreds of headlines, Hall et al. (1978) dismantle the term to reveal how it comes to

symbolically signify shared public anxieties over English identity in post-war Britain—demonstrating how perceived threats to Englishness have been displaced semiotically onto the already racially loaded symbol of the “mugger.” Hall et al. (1978) are able to convincingly demonstrate that British anxieties about the “mugger” stand in for deeper “moral panic” about the unheralded arrival of Black and Asian immigrants from former colonies. The image of the mugger speaks to existing working-class British fears about competition and contamination from the Other, and amplified by Thatcherite rhetoric becomes a powerful signifier, representing a wider section of society seen as the antithesis to Englishness. As Hall et al. (1978) point out, “Thatcherism has been able to constitute new subject positions from which its discourses about the world make sense or to appropriate itself existing, already formed interpolations” (p.49). What Hall et al. (1978) successfully demonstrate here is how the production and circulation of dominant narratives can constitute subject positions discursively with real material effects. For Hall et al. (1978) it was the transnational circulation of the racialized discourse of “mugging” and the subjectivities produced from it that lent legitimacy to harsh prison sentences, and more broadly, a law and order approach to policing ‘the crisis’. In posterity, examining Hall et al.’s (1978) observations within the unique specificity of post-war Britain one can find striking parallels in the contemporary American context.

#### **a. Deviancy and Moral Panics**

Stanley Cohen’s (1972), and later Stuart Hall’s (1978), use of the term ‘deviancy amplification spiral’ in the construction of ‘Moral Panics’ and ‘Folk Devils’ demonstrate how public anxieties over threats to social order are mediated through dominant media discourses in circulation. Cohen (1972) first coined the term ‘deviancy amplification spiral’

in his study of the 'Mods and Rockers' subcultures in the U.K. to describe a process whereby intensified media coverage of undesirable or antisocial behavior leads to a 'moral panic,' For Cohen (1972) a "moral panic" arises when, "A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (p. 9). Drawing from Cohen's (1972) work on moral panics, Hall et al. (1978) describe how the rise of a 'moral panic' is often accompanied by the summoning of some sort of 'Folk Devil,' –an almost mythical figure, "...on to whom all our most intense feelings about things going wrong, and all our fears about what undermine our fragile insecurities are projected..." (p. 161).

#### **b. Inverting Policing the Crisis**

*Policing the Crisis* has been foundational to understanding 'moral panics' such as the AIDS and crack epidemics of the 1980's and 90's. Some of the most sustained discourses about race and criminality have intersected through the war on drugs. Just as the archetype of "the mugger" and the "mugging epidemic" of the 1970's receded from the popular consciousness, the 1980's gave rise to a new moral panic—the spread of a potent and highly addictive form of cocaine, colloquially referred to as 'crack' (Cobbina, 2008). Although the object of anxieties had shifted, the subject had remained the same—young black men of the inner cities. Summoning and interpolating the familiar discourses and repertoire of images of the Folk Devil, the news media ran continuous coverage of stories representing black and Latinx drug dealers and users as natural threats to the established social order. In the 1990's the term "super-predators" proliferated to support the theory of "moral poverty" proposed by conservative commentators. The super-predator myth stoked further panic when criminologist John DiIulio published a 1995 column in the conservative publication, *The*

*Weekly Standard*, predicting the coming of, “tens of thousands of severely morally impoverished juvenile super-predators.” DiIulio (1995, Nov 27) explained,

They are perfectly capable of committing the most heinous acts of physical violence for the most trivial reasons (for example, a perception of slight disrespect or the accident of being in their path). They fear neither the stigma of arrest nor the pain of imprisonment. They live by the meanest code of the meanest streets, a code that reinforces rather than restrains their violent, hair-trigger mentality. In prison or out, the things that super-predators get by their criminal behavior -- sex, drugs, money -- are their own immediate rewards. Nothing else matters to them. So for as long as their youthful energies hold out, they will do what comes "naturally": murder, rape, rob, assault, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, and get high (p. 23).

The super-predator myth occupies the same rhetorical space as the “mugger” in 1970’s British society. Both labels are constructed around fear of a modern “folk devil” and both are referentially tethered to black inner-city youth. Both labels were also incorporated into popular discourses and circulated widely by the media, the police, the judiciary, public icons such as Donald Trump, and politicians including Bill and Hillary Clinton (Alexander, 2010).

With the racialized image of the super-predator crystallized in the popular mind, increased incarceration of people of color, enabled by harsh mandatory sentencing for crack cocaine offenses, and increased law enforcement presence in poor urban neighborhoods could be justified (Alexander, 2010). The strong state intervention into the war on drugs is characteristic of the “law and order society” Stuart Hall quite perceptively predicted in 1978, in PTC. The modern mimesis of the “mugger” archetype extends throughout pop culture representations and news coverage of the war on drugs. Through these narratives the same “Folk Devil” described by Hall in PTC has made a dramatic reappearance, with the same public anxieties about crime and violence used to justify mass incarceration. For example, Ayres and Jewkes (2012) demonstrated that dramatic images of crystal meth addicts in the

U.K. dailies constructed a mythology about the threat of the drug that stirred public fear, amid calls for more stringent drug policy.

It is proposed here, however, that the logic of ‘moral panics’ must be inverted to understand the current response to ‘deaths of despair’ especially from opioid overdoses. White despair, and the scourge of death accompanied by it could also be incorporated into a theory of moral poverty and its related discourses as commentators, politicians, academics, public health advocates across the political spectrum have attributed soaring opioid overdose rates to hopelessness and despair. The opioid crisis, nevertheless, has *not* produced the law and order response characteristic of previous epidemics. In the case of ‘mugging epidemic’ in the U.K., the response from the police, the judiciary, and the press was disproportionate to the reality, such that, “...the reaction to 'mugging' was out of all proportion to any level of actual threat which could be reconstructed...” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 29). As a result, the press intensified coverage of a ‘wave’ of particularly heinous robberies fitting a ‘novel’ category, judges handed out harsh ‘exemplary sentences’ for crimes fitting the ‘mugging’ description, and intense public anxiety about a crime epidemic ensued. The year of 1972, when the moral panic about the ‘mugging’ epidemic reached its apex, contrary to public sentiment, was not preceded by a period of increasing crimes that fit the ‘mugging’ category, and as Hall et al. (1978) conclude, “The situation with relation to crimes roughly categorisable as 'muggings' was certainly no worse in 1972 than it was between 1955-65 and, it could be argued statistically that it was, if anything, slightly better“ (p. 11). The opioid epidemic, which has ravaged communities and wrought death and despair, on the other hand undeniably warrants the ‘crisis’ label, but compared to immigration and threats of terrorism, the response, both structurally and discursively, has been anemic. From 1999 to 2017, 218,000 people in the

United States died in from overdoses related to prescription opioids, not including heroin and synthetic opioids (Scholl et al., 2019). In 2017, 49,068 deaths in the U.S. involved opioids, a substantial increase from 2016 when 42,249 died from opioids (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019). In the first two years of Trump’s presidency more people died from opioids than did in the entire Vietnam war (Humphries, 2018, Jun 7). In the face of this macabre reality, the media and politicians devote relatively little time to addressing the crisis—instead opting to cover immigration, the economy, and political rivalries. When the opioid crisis is reported on, coverage tends not to follow the conventional crime reporting script, which Hall et al. (1978) explain typically, “...marks out the transgression of normative boundaries, followed by an investigation, arrest, and social retribution in terms of the sentencing of the offender (p. 67). Rather than a criminal issue, the news media routinely frames opioid addiction as a public health issue. The ideological reproduction of the public health narrative is not only intermediated by the press, it is also reinforced in the medical field, by addiction advocacy groups, by law enforcement, by the judiciary, and by the state.

The state, as embodied by the present administration, for example, has advanced a very particular structural approach to the opioid crisis, which privileges the ‘public health’ narrative. This became evident when Donald Trump declared the opioid crisis a “health emergency” but stopped short of calling a national emergency, which would have opened up additional resources for drug treatment and enforcement. Trump has instead reserved invocations of emergency powers to install his anti-immigration vision (Tackett and Sullivan, 2019, Aug 24). Sidestepping congress, which had rejected several deals to deliver \$5.7 billion for the wall, on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Trump declared a national emergency on the Southern border. Under this declaration, emergency powers can be used to override the limits



of presidential authority—in particular the ability to mobilize immense military and monetary resources (Baker, 2019, Feb 15). Within these structures of representation and authority, the Trump administration has framed immigration as the preeminent threat to the safety of Americans, stirring an intense ‘moral panic’ about an imminent incursion from Central American and Mexican migrants. Summoning his favorite “folk devils,” Trump made unsubstantiated claims that members of the MS-13 street gang and the terrorist organization, ISIS had infiltrated a migrant caravan on its way to the U.S. border and fabricated statistics to declare that illegal immigrants have been responsible for 63,000 deaths of Americans since 9/11 (Qui., 2018, Oct 22). These, among other assertions were used as justification for the construction of the Southern border wall—a symbol loaded with meaning about crime, identity, race and class. Just how anxieties about youth, race and class are “condensed into the image of ‘mugging’” in early 70’s British society, Mexican and Central American immigrants are strategically reduced to the fear-packed metaphor of MS-13. The Trump administration’s attempts to forge a symbolic association between immigration, crime and contamination are consistent with Hall et al.’s (1978) concept of “ideological displacement,” whereby a “perceived or symbolic threat to society...” is unloaded onto a particular person, group, or behavior. Hall et al. (1978) could very well be referring to the contemporary rhetoric around immigration when describing how mugging in early 70’s U.K. society comes to signify, “...such general themes as crime in the streets, breakdown in law and order, race and poverty, a general rise in lawlessness and violence” (p. 27). The cultivation of a perceived increases in ‘mugging’, Hall et al (1978) argue provided galvanization for a “anti-crime, anti-black, anti-riot, anti-liberal, 'law-and-order' backlash” exemplified by Thatcher’s authoritarian and populists agenda (p. 27).

### **c. Trump and Ideological Displacement: The Mythic Immigrant**

Trump's brand of authoritarian populism shares many similarities. In early 2019, when a newly democratic-controlled house denied funding for the wall, Trump took the extreme measure of shutting down the government for a record of 32 days, while using unprecedented executive powers to declare a national emergency that would release federal funds for the southern border wall (Baker, 2019, Feb 15). With blame for the government shutdown increasingly falling on Trump, the president issued a nationally televised address to bring attention to the 'crisis at the border' (Tackett and Sullivan, 2019, Jan 10). In the speech, Trump frames the crisis as a humanitarian one—"A crisis of the heart, and a crisis of the soul"—ignoring the fact that 'humanitarian crisis' at the border has been largely manufactured by family separation policies, systematic denials of lawful political asylum requests—practices that were primarily the makings of the Trump administration. The 'crisis' is also inevitably linked to the death of innocent Americans. In a nationally televised address on immigration, which Trumps calls "a crisis of the soul," for example he declared,

In Maryland, MS-13 gang members who arrived in the United States as unaccompanied minors were arrested and charged last year after viciously stabbing and beating a 16-year-old girl. Over the last several years I have met with dozens of families whose loved ones were stolen by illegal immigration. I have held the hands of the weeping mothers and embraced the grief stricken fathers. So sad, so terrible. I will never forget the pain in their eyes, the tremble in their voices, and the sadness gripping their souls. How much more American blood must we shed before Congress does its job? (The New York Times (2019, Jan 8).

Soon after the televised address, Trump flew to McAllen Texas, where he met with border agents, lauded his immigration agenda, disparaged his political opponents, and posed for photo opportunities. As cameras rolled, Trump declared that without the wall there will be, "Death. A lot of death"—a rhetorical maneuver tying the wall referentially to 'law and

order’ (Tackett and Sullivan, 2019, Jan 10). Trump’s utterances and tweets about threats to law and order posed by immigrants and subsequent circulation by the press as sound bites and headlines is consistent with a discursive practice Stanley Cohen has called the “deviance amplification spiral.” This process is characterized by intensifying media coverage of antisocial, deviant, or otherwise ‘criminal’ behavior and the successive generation of a moral panic around perceived threats posed by the specific deviancy. The circulation of stories connecting immigrants to deviant and criminal behavior amplifies the perceived threat from the immigrant community. Even as statistics consistently indicate that immigrants engage in less crimes than native-born Americans, the entire immigrant community has been systematically criminalized—packed into the hyper-charged metaphor of MS-13, and the abhorrent violence practiced by the vicious street gang. Trump has been instrumental in manufacturing the link between the immigration and criminality. While displaying extraordinary antagonism to what he has called the ‘immoral media,’ Trump has deployed a masterful technique of using the press to amplify his message, specifically with regard to his immigration agenda. Messages dispersed through so-called “twitter bombs,” bombastic diatribes, and public comments, enter into the media stratosphere and are amplified through social media feeds, sound bites, tabloids, and endless cable television coverage.

### **1. Agenda Setting Along the Southern Border**

These messages perform more than just a discursive or symbolic function—it has driven public policy agenda—namely construction of the southern border wall—necessitating a discussion of the agenda setting function of mass media. The agenda setting function of mass media refers to, “...the transfer of issue salience from the news media to the public agenda” (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014, p.787). In early agenda setting research McCombs &

Shaw (1972) set out to understand the capacity of mass media content to determine what voters considered to be the most salient issues during the 1968 presidential election. Using a sample of voters from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that “the media appear to have exerted considerable impact on voters’ judgement of what they considered to be the major issues of the campaign...” (p. 180). This groundbreaking study served as a catalyst for successive generations of agenda setting scholars attempting to examine the impact of media coverage on perceived issue salience among various constituencies. Hall et al. (1978) meanwhile observed how journalistic practices in newsrooms, including editorial decisions to run or drop a story, can amplify or diminish the salience of an issue—a process the authors refer to as the “social production of news.” In the case of the insurgent “mugging epidemic” sweeping across the U.K. Hall et al. (1978) amply demonstrate how editorial decisions made by newspaper dailies’ helped to increase public awareness of a new category crime, and consequently amplify anxieties about decaying social order. As Hall et al. (1978) explain,

...it is sufficient to say that news values provide the criteria in the routine practices of journalism which enable journalists, editors and newsmen to decide routinely which stories are 'newsworthy' and which are not, which stories are major 'lead' stories, and which are relatively insignificant, which stories to run and which to drop. Although they are nowhere written down, formally transmitted or codified, news values seem to be widely shared as between the different news media... (p. 54)

Agenda setting and social production processes have been often used to explain the variability in issue salience among different ‘crises’ such climate change, violent crime, drug use, and immigration, along with many other topics. For example, Dunaway, Branton and Abrajano (2010) found that increased media coverage of immigration in border states vs non-border states contributed to greater issue salience with regard to immigration in border states.

Recent studies have also considered how social media has added new complexities and layers to the social production and agenda setting processes. McCombs, Shaw & Weaver (2014) note,

With the widespread diffusion of social media, agenda-setting theory can be applied to a much wider array of channels and more easily to an array of content extending far beyond the traditional focus on public affairs. Scholars have the opportunity to examine the transfer of salience between many different kinds of agendas. Even within the dominant news media agenda-public agenda dyad, numerous operational definitions of these agendas are emerging. And as these emerging agendas are defined by wider ranges of content and communication channels, agenda setting as we have known it—the flow of the salience of the top issues of the moment from the news media to the public agenda—will be only one of numerous agenda-setting processes (p.788)

### **1. Twitter Bombing: Agenda Setting in the New Media Environment**

Trump's fervent use of twitter to stir up moral panic about threats to social order has generated new insights into how public figures, social media platforms and their users can shape the public agenda. Writing in 2011, almost forty years after his earliest works on moral panics, Stanley Cohen recognized the power of social networks as they relate to the circulation of moral panics. "We can easily see that changes in information technology and the massive potential of social networks alone would account for the ease and speed at which moral panics can be transmitted and constructed" Cohen (2011, p. 239) wrote. An examination of agenda setting in the new media environment, therefore necessitates consideration of the role *users* play in the diffusion and amplification of discourses, images, narratives, and events to influence public opinion. Twitter has proven to be a crucial tool for shaping political and cultural narratives, and this was never more apparent than during the 2016 presidential election. Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton devoted roughly half of their tweets to attacking the other candidate during the final three months of the 2016 presidential

campaign, and “those attacks were effective in attracting favorites and retweets for both candidates” (Lee and Xu, 2018, p. 201). For Trump, tweets focusing on media bias and Clinton’s alleged dishonesty drew significantly more user reactions in the form of favorites and retweets, “while none of the issues Clinton emphasized were significant predictors of favorites and retweets” (Lee and Xu, 2018, p. 201). This demonstrates how issue salience can be amplified not only by the sender, but also by the receivers/users themselves.

Twitter, meanwhile has consistently been Trump’s preferred medium for communicating threats posed by immigration – His endless blitzkrieg of provocations and shock and awe attacks, make for ‘instant news’ that the mainstream news cycle struggles to keep up with. As of January 15, 2019 Trump had sent out 605 tweets containing the word “border,” 357 with the word “wall,” 235 with the word “immigration,” 76 with the word “immigrant,” 51 with the word “alien,” 56 with the word “illegals,” 36 with the word “MS-13,” “MS13,” or “MS 13” accounting for 1,416 total tweets (see table 1). A large proportion of these tweets connected immigration to crime or criminality, and the wall as the necessary solution to stop it. A December 27, 2018 tweet reading, “There is right now a full scale manhunt going on in California for an illegal immigrant accused of shooting and killing a police officer during a traffic stop. Time to get tough on Border Security. Build the Wall!,” (is representative of this pattern (realDonaldTrump, 2018, Dec 27). This tweet had more than 36,000 retweets and more than 147,000 likes. In another tweet on January 5, 2019, Trump claimed that the wall is “...something which everyone, other than drug dealers, human traffickers and criminals, want very badly!” – depicting the wall as a symbol of law and order, and opposition to it as criminal (realDonaldTrump, 2019, Jan 5).

Table 1: Trump Tweets by Topic: Immigration (as of 1/15/19)

<b>Trump Tweets by Topic: Immigration (As of 1/15/19)</b>	
<b>Term</b>	<b>Number of Tweets</b>
“Border”	605
“Wall”	235
“Immigration” or “Immigrant”	301
“Alien” or “Illegals”	107
“MS-13” “MS13” or “MS 13”	36
<b>Total: 1,416</b>	

To put all of this in perspective, Trump has sent out only 15 tweets that include the word “opioid,” 5 tweets with the word “heroin,” with all 5 connecting heroin to immigration, and 3 tweets with the word “fentanyl,” with all 3 connecting fentanyl to China, and 0 with the word “pharmaceutical” or “pharma,” and 4 tweets with mention of “overdose” with 2 of those connecting fatalities from drugs coming from the southern border. This accounts for only 27 total tweets (see table 2). The meager attention to the opioid epidemic relative to immigration and border security is astonishing considering the depth of the opioid crisis, and the death and despair that it has wrought across the United States.

Table 2: Trump Tweets by Topic: Opioid Crisis

<b>Trump Tweets by Topic: Opioid Crisis (As of 1/15/19)</b>	
<b>Term</b>	<b>Number of Tweets</b>
“Opioid”	15
“Heroin”	5
“Fentanyl”	3
“Pharmaceutical” or “Pharma”	0
“Overdose”	4
<b>Total: 27</b>	

Low concern about the opioid epidemic relative to immigration seems to be also reflected in public opinion surveys. In a Gallup poll of likely voters just ahead of the Nov. 2018 midterm elections eighty-one percent of respondents cited “Non-economic problems”

as their top concern, with “Immigration” (21%) being the most commonly reported, followed by “The government/Poor leadership” (18%) and “Healthcare (11%). Only 13% of respondents cited “economic problems” as the most important problem facing the nation, with “The Economy in General”, “Unemployment/Jobs” and “Federal Budget Deficit/Federal Debt,” among the most common concerns. Remarkably, at the height of America’s deadliest drug epidemic only 1% listed “Drugs” as their top concern, behind “Lack of respect for each other” (6%) and “Welfare” (2%), among many others. (Newport, 2018, Nov 2). This clearly indicates that public concern is not proportional of the gravity of America’s worst drug epidemic. The question is, why?

#### **F, The Opioid Crisis as a Discursive Formation**

To arrive at some possible explanations, we must ask further questions; is there a relationship between low issue salience with regards to the opioid epidemic and the relatively low amount of attention it receives from policymakers and media outlets alike? An understanding of this complex relationship must involve charting conjunctures between a confluence of discourses emanating from the media, policymakers, the state, the police, industry players, and the judiciary. It is argued here that the conjunctural analysis methodology outlined by Hall et al. (1978) in PTC, provides a clear map for examining this relationship. The logic of PTC—that an imaginary ‘crisis’ was used as validation for extraordinary measures and interventions—however, must be *inverted*. In the case of the ‘mugging crisis’ state interventions were “out of all proportion to any level of actual threat” (Hall et. al. 1978, p. 29), resulting in long ‘exemplary’ prison sentences for mostly black and brown men—and ultimately the assemblage of the modern carceral state. The opioid epidemic—a crisis exponentially more-grave, in contrast, has not prompted the same ‘tough



on crime’ response, especially when it comes to the prosecution and incarceration of mostly white users.

With the increased government and law enforcement attention to opioid addiction as a public ‘health crisis’, along with a renewed focus on treatment over mass incarceration, there has been dramatic shift in how the subject position of illicit drug users are constituted symbolically and materially through public discourse, policing procedures and policy directives. It is argued, that with the staggering rise of opioid addiction within white, suburban, middle class communities over the past two decades, the drug user has been reconstituted through a new discursive formation, which serves to elicit sympathy and promote awareness of addiction and recovery. The proliferation of opioid abuse in white suburban/rural middle-class communities seems to coincide with a dramatic shift in the rhetoric of the war on drugs—from mass incarceration of users to a softer “treatment approach.” Although, the benefits of such an approach should not be understated, one must critically examine why police and policymakers are abandoning the mass incarceration tactics associated with the war on crack cocaine of the 1980’s and 90’s, in favor of a softer treatment and recovery approach. Many critics have suggested that these policy shifts correspond directly with changes in the demographics (chiefly race and class) of the user, from black and Latinx residents of the inner cities, to suburban white populations.

Thus, the opioid epidemic has motivated new rhetorical and material interventions, that stand in contrast to extreme punitive measures taken during previous epidemics. As two of the U.S. states hardest hit by the opioid epidemic and often considered leaders in spearheading innovative approaches to combating addiction, Massachusetts and New Hampshire have been sites of rich and often contentious public discourse about the war on

opioids. This has been reflected in policy discussions, public health forums, community dialogues, and policing prerogatives. For example, the city of Manchester in New Hampshire has developed an innovative program called, “Safe Station,” which designates all fire houses in the city as help centers for “victims of substance misuse disorder” (Feathers, 2019, Feb 1). Individuals can walk into these Safe Stations “at any time of day or night”, no questions asked, and be connected to recovery and treatment resources. According to the city of Manchester’s official website, “If illegal substances are with the individuals seeking assistance, Manchester Police Department will be notified for disposal purposes only” (Safe Station, 2019, May 21. Para. 4). These practices and discourses are typical of the response to the opioid crisis. Instead of addicts, they are “victims of substance misuse disorder”, and instead of being sent to jail for possession of drugs, they are sent to treatment. In March 2018, Trump visited one of safe stations in Manchester, and hailed the benefits of the model (Green, 2018, Sep 17).

Similar models have been implemented in Massachusetts. After a rash of opioid overdoses in 2015, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, a predominantly white fishing community north of Boston, Police Chief Leonard Campanello, announced the “Angel” initiative, a program that would allow addicts to receive treatment instead of jail time. The program was heralded by addiction advocates, policymakers, and police departments around Massachusetts, and the nation, as a model program. After its adoption, similar programs were implemented across the commonwealth and beyond, and received considerable national press coverage applauding the divergence from conventional punitive measures associated with the war on drugs (MacQuarrie, 2017, Feb 21). The June 5, 2016 ABCNews feature, “How a Heroin Crisis Sparked a Police Revolution,” and the January 24, 2016 New York Times story

“Massachusetts Chief’s Tack in Drug War: Steer Addicts to Rehab, Not Jail” are just a couple of examples. In 2016, Chief Campanello was even honored by the Obama Administration as one of ten “Champions of Change,” Although Campanello was ultimately fired from Gloucester Police department amid an investigation into the tampering of evidence, his police assisted recovery program continues to operate and his message about treating addiction as a health problem, not a criminal problem, has continued to resonate with many at the highest levels of the U.S. government (MacQuarrie, 2017, Feb 21). In March of 2016, speaking at Drug Abuse summit in Atlanta President Obama pledged hundreds of millions of dollars over the next several years to tackle the treatment of opioid addiction, while leaving several notable quotes to be picked up and circulated by mainstream media outlets, including, “Drug addiction is a health problem, not a criminal problem,” and, “For too long we’ve viewed drug addiction through the lens of criminal justice” (Landler, 2016, Mar 29). This same language and philosophy was the impulse behind rare bipartisan drafting of legislature, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), which was passed in congress with a 94-1 vote, and signed into law by Obama on June 22, 2016. CARA authorized \$181 million dollars a year to fund non-punitive approaches to fight opiate/opioid addiction, including treatment of addiction and education (Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, 2016, Nov)

More, recently Trump declared the opioid epidemic as a national public health emergency, and congress included 3.3 billion in the 2018 fiscal year budget and pledged 500 million annually. These are not small numbers but must be considered relationally to costs it would take to build Trump’s southern border wall, which have been estimated to be between 8 and 67 billion dollars (Baker, 2019, Feb 15).

Trump's decision to declare a 'national emergency' over the immigration crisis, while determining the opioid crisis is a 'public health emergency', also reveals a stunning contradiction. The national emergency status is much farther reaching and gives the president the broad power to circumvent congress to install his border agenda. In an extraordinary display of what Althusser has called the Repressive State Apparatus, Trump used these emergency powers to release a torrent of monetary and military resources, including the deployment of the national guard along the southern border (Baker, 2019, Feb 15). This strategy is just one sign of a slow pivot to far right authoritarianism. This swing has been propelled not just by consolidating executive and military powers, but also by a coordinated attempt to install a new hegemonic order, or what Althusser has referred to as the Ideological State Apparatus. In the present situation, we are observing an intense struggle transpiring on ideological terrain—one that pits the old democratic order against the radical right, and against the more moderate wing of Trump's own party. In his 1979 essay, "Great Moving Right Show" Stuart Hall (1979) also observed internally, a remarkably similar development in the incipient rise of a far-right hegemonic social formation in the U.K. Hall (1979) explained,

It is engaged in a struggle for hegemony, within the dominant bloc, against both social democracy and the moderate wing of its own party. Not only is it operating in the same space: it is working directly on the contradictions within these competing positions. The strength of its intervention lies partly in the radicalism of its commitment to break the mould, not simply to rework the elements of the prevailing "philosophies". In doing so, it nevertheless takes the elements which are already constructed into place, dismantles them, reconstitutes them into a new logic, and articulates the space in a new way, polarizing it to the Right. (p. 16)

In PTC Hall et al. (1978) also describe how a relatively settled conjuncture defined by a stable and familiar idea of Englishness, is ruptured and comes apart, creating another

conjuncture characterized by unified anxieties about race and crime. In this radical new conjuncture, complex articulations between the state, the media, the judiciary, coalesce to deliver a new ideological and material order marked by increased need for security, discipline, and law and order. As Hall (1979) observed,

Many of the key themes of the radical Right—law and order, the need for social discipline and authority in the face of a conspiracy by the enemies of the state, the onset of social anarchy, the "enemy within", the dilution of British stock by alien black elements (p. 16).

In very much the same way, anxieties about the increasingly distressed position of middle and working-class whites in America have been displaced onto Mexican and Central American immigrants. This anxiety can partly explain the unanticipated rise of the *Make America Great Again* doctrine—an exceptional form of governance that blends the seemingly contradictory ideologies of authoritarianism and populism. This brand of politics and its associated discourses, however, are not new—firmly rooted in the neoliberal and ‘tough on crime’ orders forged by Thatcher and Reagan. In the U.K., as demonstrated by Hall et al. (1978), the racialized discourses around the ‘mugging epidemic’ were emblematic of the politics that would produce an emergent authoritarian populism. If we look at the current of ideological and political order, we must examine the multitude of discourses and material realities that intersected to facilitate the ascent of Trump. The dramatic increase in fatalities from drugs, alcohol and suicide (deaths of despair) and Trump, at first to not seem to be evidently connected, but further inquiry reveals important intersections that are worthy of scrutiny.

## **G. Authoritarian Populism**

### **1. The Curious Connection between Trump and Despair**

In a recent study by Shannon Monnat (2016), at Pennsylvania State University a curious link was established between deaths of despair and the appeal of Donald Trump. Monnat (2016) found that Trump over-performed in counties with the highest rates of so-called “deaths of despair” or mortality from drugs, alcohol and suicide. Monnat (2016) focused on three regions where the opioid epidemic has received considerable attention, the Industrial Midwest, Appalachia, and New England, and found that nationally and in all three regions, Trump performed better than Romney in counties with higher drug, alcohol and suicide mortality rates. Monnat (2016) found that the relationship between Trump’s performance and mortality was especially pronounced in New England. In counties with the lowest mortality rates, Trump actually performed worse than Romney by an average of 3.1 percentage points, and in counties with the highest rates of mortalities, Trump performed better than Romney by nearly 10 points. Take, for example, Coos County, New Hampshire, which has the highest drug, alcohol and suicide mortality rate in New England. Coos County was once a democratic stronghold, with Obama winning by nearly 20 points in 2008, and again by more than 17 points in 2012. But in the 2016 election, the county swung dramatically to the right, with Trump winning by nearly 10 points. So, what precipitated this shift? New England, The Midwest and Appalachia, considered ground zero of opioid crisis, Monnat (2016) points out, tend to host large white populations and have suffered from economic decline and deindustrialization since the 1980’s. It should come as no surprise then that Trump’s message of economic nationalism and unapologetic celebration of white identity resonated in pockets of the country hit hardest by opioid crisis. Monnat (2016), therefore cautions against

interpreting the findings to mean that the opioid crisis, to which a large share of deaths of despair have been attributed, propelled Donald Trump to victory. Drug, alcohol and suicide mortalities are higher in counties with more economic distress and larger working-class presence nationally and in Appalachia, the Industrial Midwest and New England. Hence, it can be surmised that, “much of the relationship between mortality and Trump’s performance is explained by economic factors” (Monnat, 2016, p. 4). In New England in particular there was a clearly mapped demarcation between counties with low economic distress and poor Trump performance versus counties with high economic distress and strong Trump performance. Rather than causality between deaths of despair and Trump’s popularity, the research Monnat (2016) suggests, underscores “the complex economic, social, and political forces that combined to produce the unexpected outcome of the 2016 Presidential election” (p. 6). Using a national sample of Medicare claims data, Goodwin et al. (2018) also found that Trump support in the 2016 presidential election was correlated with chronic prescription opioid use, with a coefficient of .42 ( $p < .001$ ). In counties with higher than average opioid use Trump won 59.96% of the vote, while in counties with lower than average opioid use, Trump won 38.67% of the vote. Roughly two thirds of the relationship between opioid rates and presidential voting could be explained by county level socioeconomic measures, but the authors also underscored the importance of cultural and environmental factors associated with the opioid epidemic (Goodwin et al., 2018).

Still, this research has compelled some analysts to ask: Did the opioid epidemic help Donald Trump win? An article entitled, *Did the Opioid Epidemic Help Donald Trump Win?* by Zoe Carpenter, published in the December 2016 edition of *The Nation*, asks this precise question. The answer for Carpenter is a complex one, reinforcing Monnat’s (2016) and

Goodwin et al's. (2018) conclusions that it was not opioid prescriptions or deaths of despair alone that, "caused the swing towards Trump". Rather it was an interaction between discursive, environmental, cultural and socioeconomic factors that propelled Trump to victory. In particular, it was an ability to construct anxieties around a common culprit, which could be blamed all at once for rising economic distress, the decline of law and order, the unraveling of a once stable white identity, as well as the influx of cheap drugs in many working-class communities. As Carpenter (2016, Dec 7) suggests, "Trump offered a scapegoat for the overdose crisis and the related, rapid fraying of the social fabric in white communities: immigrants," while speaking, "to the concern about drugs and to racial anxieties in the same breath, promising to keep heroin out with his wall, and to deport millions of "gang members [and] drug dealers " (para. 5). The attribution of overdose deaths to immigration and open border policies was a prominent trope at many of Trump's campaign rallies, which included several stops in regions most affected by the opioid epidemic. In a June rally in Ohio, for instance, Trump attributed a nearly 20 percent increase in overdose deaths in that state to open border policies (C-SPAN, 2016, Sep 14), and just days before the 2016 election Trump told crowds at a New Hampshire rally that the wall is the solution for the state's dire opioid crisis, proclaiming that the wall will not only, "keep out the dangerous drug dealers, it will also keep out ... the heroin poisoning our youth." Trump continued, "You look at the beautiful little roadways, lakes and trees, and everything is so beautiful, the trees, you say, how could they have a drug problem here, it doesn't fit" (Dezenski, 2017, Oct 28). In this prognostication, Trump portrays the opioid crisis as a threat that is foreign to New Hampshire's bucolic landscapes and the overwhelmingly white populace that inhabit them. In this version, the opioid epidemic is not a homegrown crisis



enflamed by corrupt doctors and pharmaceutical executives and the over-prescription of powerful painkillers for common ailments, but rather a product of open borders and the drugs flowing across them into places like New Hampshire. While there is some truth to both versions, the pharmaceutical industry is widely known to have been the primary driver of the current opioid addiction crisis. In fact, half of all opioid addictions started with prescription painkillers (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019). Yet Trump has assigned little to no blame to overprescription by doctors and deceptive marketing practices by pharmaceutical companies.

This has occurred in the face of a stark reality: opioid prescription rates are the highest in counties that voted for Trump (Goodwin et al., 2018). African-American and Hispanic patients are also less likely to be prescribed pain medication than white patients and had their pain needs met less frequently (Mosey, 2011). It is widely known that Trump was propelled to victory by lower income white voters from rural and suburban regions in the rust belt, for whom economic issues were paramount. But some research has suggested that the opioid issue played a significant role in voters' support for Trump. Kathleen Frydl has dubbed these voters the, "Oxy electorate" or, "voters in steel belt counties suffering a full-blown heroin and fentanyl crisis launched by the over-prescribing and over-distribution of the opioid painkiller Oxycontin." Frydl (2016, Nov 16) found that all but two of 25 counties in Ohio that recorded overdose fatality rates of approximately 20 per 100,000 people saw at least a 10% surge in voters who favored Trump over Romney and/or a 10% drop in voters favoring Clinton to Obama. Similar trends were seen in Pennsylvania and New Hampshire (Frydl, 2016, Nov 16). While more evidence is needed, there is suggestion that the opioid issue proved to be a decisive factor in swinging traditionally democratic electoral districts to Trump. The rhetoric

of despair employed strategically by Trump, as Frydyl (2018, Nov 27) explains, resonated with many voters in the areas most ravaged by the opioid epidemic.

Voters in places overwhelmed by the worst drug epidemic in US history had difficulty locating their story in Clinton's "America is Already Great" campaign mantra—so they decided to stay home on election day, or cast a ballot in favor of an abrasive and unconventional candidate who harped on the opioid crisis in his speeches, and conveyed a sense of urgency and despair that fit their own experience (para. 2)

Remarkably, the "Oxy electorate," decisive in swinging the 2016 presidential election to Trump, may have also propelled the 'blue wave' of the 2018 midterms that put Democrats in control of the House of Representatives (Frydyl, 2018, Nov 27). Frydyl (2018, Nov 27) found that in Pennsylvania and Ohio counties most affected by the opioid crisis, there were greater drop-offs for Republican turnout vs Democratic turnout, which Frydyl (2018, Nov 27) attributes to Republican efforts to repeal and/or replace the Affordable Care Act. Health care has become a crucial issue for the Oxy Electorate, as Frydyl (2018, Nov 27) suggests that, "in the midst of a catastrophic public health crisis, access to and the affordability of health insurance is a matter of community survival" (para. 8). This provides another layer of compelling support for the connection between the opioid epidemic and Trump support.

Sam Quinones, however, has provided perhaps the most detailed account to date of the root economic, political, social and criminological causes of the worst drug crisis in U.S. history, and its impact on American society. The genealogy of opioid epidemic, Quinones (2015) demonstrates through riveting storytelling and precise historical and geographical specificity, can be traced back to the early 1990's when pharmaceutical companies began aggressively marketing opioid painkillers as a safe and non-addictive option for treating pain in patients. The perception that powerful opioids, like Oxycodone are a safe option for pain management, common amongst doctors in the 1990's and into 2000's, Quinones (2015)

documents, can be traced to a five sentence, one paragraph letter written by a Boston University doctor. The letter, now infamously known as “The Porter and Jick Paper” included the brief conclusion, based on nearly 12,000 hospital records, that “the development of addiction is rare in medical patients with no history of addiction.” This single line in one-paragraph letter without proven clinical or methodological validity, was cited hundreds of times by academics, doctors, and in particular by the pharmaceutical industry. As a result, the ‘opioids are safe’ storyline became inculcated in medical discourse, trumpeted by pharmaceutical executives like Arthur Sackler, CEO of Purdue Pharma, and backed by pharmaceutical sales reps numbered at approximately 110,000 at one point. With this massive marketing apparatus, and the support of “medical research,” Purdue Pharma and other large pharmaceutical companies were able to convince doctors that powerful opioids like OxyContin, were safe options for pain management. Meanwhile, unscrupulous physicians, willing to prescribe powerful painkillers for cash to virtually anyone, began to set up low overhead pain clinics called “pill mills” or what Quinones (2015) has described as “a virtual ATM for dope.” Pill mills popped up in places like the Rust Belt town of Portsmouth, Ohio, once a living portrait of small-town America. When Dr. David Proctor, known as the “Godfather of the Pill Mill,” started liberally prescribing Percocet, OxyContin, and Vicodin for cash just across the Ohio river in South Shore, Kentucky, Portsmouth was soon flooded with powerfully addictive painkillers, turning a once thriving small town into the epicenter of America’s opioid crisis. Between 2005 and 2008, drug overdose fatalities in Ohio alone outnumbered deaths of U.S. soldiers in the entire Iraq War, by 50 percent (Quinones, 2015). Throughout the Midwest, Appalachia, and many other regions of the U.S., similar pill mills were established, inundating communities with powerful painkillers. In 1997, OxyContin

prescriptions for chronic pain numbered at 670,000, rising to 6.2 million in 2002. At its peak in 2012 there were 255,207,954 prescriptions dispensed in the United States, representing a prescribing rate of 81.3 per 100 persons (U.S. Opioid Prescribing Rate Maps, 2006-2017). In a tiny West Virginia town of 3,191 residents two pharmacies dispensed 20.8 million prescription painkillers over a 10-year period—that's more than 6,500 per person (Gutierrez, Reiss, & Siemaszko, 2018, Feb 1). Prohibitively high prescription rates were inevitably followed by a wave of addiction, and an ensuing rash of overdoses. By 2008, opioid overdoses surpassed automobile accidents as the leading cause of premature death, and a clear picture of the epidemic had emerged; it was rapidly coursing through the veins of mostly rural and middle-class white communities across the nation (Quinones, 2015). The scourge of addiction in white communities, Quinones (2015), observed was accompanied by a softening approach to drug policy—even amongst previously staunch supporters of the law and order regimen exercised through the war on drugs. As Quinones (2015) points out,

...coincidentally or not, this change of heart was happening among conservatives just as opiate addiction was spreading among both rural and middle-class white kids across the country, though perhaps most notably in the deepest red counties and states. Drug enslavement and death, so close at hand, were touching the lives, and softening the hearts, of many Republican lawmakers and constituents. I'll count this as a national moment of Christian forgiveness. But I also know that it was a forgiveness that many of these lawmakers didn't warm to when urban crack users were the defendants. Let's just say that firsthand exposure to opiate addiction can change a person's mind about a lot of things. Many of their constituents were no longer so enamored with that "tough on crime" talk now that it was their kids who were involved. So a new euphemism emerged— "smart on crime"—to allow these politicians to support the kind of rehabilitation programs that many of them had used to attack others not so long ago (p. 276).

The wave of addiction wrought in rural and suburban communities in historically red states was accompanied by changing attitudes towards the addict and addiction. The heroin addict was no longer the faceless and anonymous junkie in the alleyways of large urban

centers—it was the captain of the football team, the cheerleader, the valedictorian. Now that the crisis was “next door” and the affected overwhelmingly white communities, several new discursive constructions emerged. Opioid addiction was now a public health issue not a criminal issue, a disease, not a choice, deserving treatment, not incarceration. The opioid epidemic, Quinones (2015) notes, “made a lot of criminal-justice reformers out of rock-ribbed white conservatives” (p. 274). The ‘tough on crime’ line so emblematic of war on drugs and repeated by many conservative lawmakers and centrist Democrats at the height of the crack epidemic, shifted to a softer tone as the face of addiction became whiter and more suburban. The ‘mugging epidemic’ in the U.K, as Hall et al. (1978) also observe, was met with very different set of discursive and material responses. The response from lawmakers and media, was to focus on, “...more policing, tougher sentencing, better family discipline, the rising crime rate as an index of social disintegration, the threat to “ordinary people going about their private business” from thieves, muggers, etc., the wave of lawlessness, of the loss of law abidingness” (p. 19). The law and order, tough on crime stances still predominate political discourses, but are rarely applied to the white, suburban opioid addict. As Quinones (2016, Nov 21) observed soon after the 2016 election,

In these areas, too, the “throw away the key” approach to drug addiction was unquestioned dogma until the opiate scourge. That is changing. Democrats may still not get elected in a region like northern Kentucky, for instance, but Republicans who talk only tough on crime now have a hard time there, too – so harsh is the pill and heroin problem (para. 24).

The move away from the law and order approach to drug addiction has been accompanied another discursive shift. Blame has been displaced from the pharmaceutical companies that sparked the deadliest drug crisis in history, as well as the addicts themselves, and plunked onto immigrants. Sam Quinones also chronicles this process. With extraordinary

detail Quinones (2015) describes how the unfettered flow of powerful pharmaceutical opioids into communities across the nation resulted in widespread recreational use and inevitably addiction. For many newly stricken opioid addicts, prescription painkillers became too expensive or difficult to procure, and moved on to a much cheaper and potent high—shooting up heroin (Quinones, 2015). This story is repeated thousands of times. A construction worker is hurt on the job, prescribed Vicodin, Percocet or OxyContin, becomes addicted, and moves on to heroin once the pills become too expensive or scarce. As demand for cheap and pure heroin increased, a group of sugarcane farmers from the small Mexican state of Nayarit saw opportunity and began running drugs to areas where the pharmaceutical companies had produced a readymade consumer. These drug runners, which Quinones (2015) refers to as the “Xalisco Boys,” named after a tiny agricultural community in Nayarit, were a close-knit group of young men with deep familial ties, seeking to find opportunity in the north that would free them from the backbreaking and degrading work on the sugarcane farm. Once established, the Xalisco Boys devised a sophisticated delivery system for distributing black-tar heroin to new addicts across predominately white rural areas and midsized cities in the Midwest, like Portsmouth, Ohio. The Xalisco Boys deliberately chose markets in which little to competition existed, opting to avoid large cities like Philadelphia or New York where violent street gangs had already established their turf. The Xalisco Boys were known to be polite and even tempered, and with a phone call would deliver the drugs to the user, often white and not accustomed to or too afraid to purchase drugs in open air markets. Importantly, they also did not engage in the violence, intimidation and extortion

associated with Mexican drug cartels (Quinones, 2015). As Quinones (2015) succinctly puts it,

And so it went. OxyContin first, introduced by reps from Purdue Pharma over steak and dessert and in air-conditioned doctors' offices. Within a few years, black tar heroin followed in tiny, uninflated balloons held in the mouths of sugarcane farm boys from Xalisco driving old Nissan Sentras to meet-ups in McDonald's parking lots (p. 269).

For the predominantly white rust belt communities where the Xalisco Boys operated, drug transactions were often the sole conduit for encounters with Mexican immigrants. For families of addicts, members law enforcement, and politicians, the Mexico-heroin connection enflamed already deep-seated antagonisms. Mexico, for many, was responsible for draining the rust belt of its manufacturing industry, once thriving and an important source of pride and sustenance—and now Mexican immigrants were competing for the few jobs that were left—and to make matters worse, bringing cheap heroin with them (Quinones, 2015). As Quinones (2016, Nov 21) explains,

People also grew to understand that virtually all our heroin comes from or through Mexico – which is why it is cheaper and more potent than ever in our history. That did nothing to engender love for our southern neighbor in regions that had lost factories as well as kids. Nor did it make them feel that we have a serious and modern partner in Mexico when it comes to criminal justice and law enforcement (para. 17)

With recognition of this context, Donald Trump's promises to "Make America Great Again" and to "Build The Wall" gain important significance. The wall takes on powerful symbolic weight, as the antidote to anxieties about loss of white identity, loss of jobs to immigrants, the loss and the manufacturing to Mexico, and importantly, a physical barrier that will keep out the, "drug dealers and criminals" and "bad hombres." Trump spoke to and amplified all of the anxieties that the opioid crisis had unleashed in the heartland without explicitly naming it. The shame and pain of losing a friend or loved one to overdose could

now be channeled into anger, and in Trump an unlikely advocate was found—one that allowed families to reassign blame. It was no longer the failures of families or the individual, a breakdown of community, unscrupulous doctors or the ills of the neoliberal free market which gave big pharma unchecked power to profit enormously from pedaling powerful drugs. Trump provided a more simplistic explanation: it was immigrants and Mexico.

After Sam Quinones’ seminal historiography of the opioid crisis was published in 2015, he returned to the Heartland areas where his research began—this time just before the 2016 presidential election. What he observed provides a compelling account of the connection between Trump support and the ravaging effects of the opioid crisis in many Heartland communities. Quinones’ (2016, Nov 21) blog chronicles his research, activism, and interactions with families and lawmakers in many communities most impacted by the opioid scourge. The following post details his observations leading up to the astounding success Trump enjoyed in the Heartland, which proved to be pivotal to his victory in the general election:

This fall I traveled a lot to Heartland areas to talk about a book I’d written about opiate addiction in America, and this provided me with a close view of the rise of Donald Trump’s candidacy.

The areas where I spoke were particularly hard hit by narcotic abuse — rural Michigan, southern Indiana, West Virginia, Kentucky, and several towns in rural Ohio.

The prevalence of Trump/Pence yard signs in these areas, particularly by mid-October, was stunning. As I traveled, it seemed palpable, this connection between Trump support and opiate addiction.

Some of these areas did not fully rebound from the Great Recession of 2007 (southern Ohio). Others fared much better (North Carolina). A common denominator, I think political scientists will find, is that in these areas since the last presidential election the incidence of opiate addiction spread, grew deadlier, more public, and went from pain pills to heroin. In southern Ohio, where heroin has hit like pestilence, particularly Appalachia, Trump trounced his opponent in counties that Mitt Romney barely won four years earlier



– though unemployment in many of these counties is at its lowest level in years, sometimes decades.

This story plays out today with intensity in several of the states crucial to Trump’s victory – Ohio, North Carolina, Pennsylvania. It does the same in states he was assumed to win: West Virginia, Oklahoma, Utah, Kentucky, Indiana, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and others. That *these* states – largely rural, religious, and white – are now our heroin beltways amounts to a stunning change in our national culture and one that most people in those areas became aware of only recently.

Equally stunning is that New York, California and Illinois – including New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, once our heroin hotspots – are well down the list of states ranked by addiction rates. Hillary Clinton won each of them. (Quinones, 2016, Nov 21, para. 1-6)

The popularity of Trump in the “heroin beltway” and other areas ravaged by the scourge of addiction also reveals a stunning contradiction. Condensed into the Trump brand, is all the worst ills of the savage capitalism, staunch neoliberalism, and corporate greed that the opioid crisis has its origins in. This is evident in the extraordinary case of Purdue Pharma, and the Sackler family, which have been found responsible for playing a key role in manufacturing the opioid crisis, and continued to aggressively promote OxyContin, even with knowledge that it was being widely abused as a street narcotic (Meier, 2018, May 29). The enormous damages wrought by an epidemic manufactured by the private sector— to communities, to families, to the economy, and to public health—however, paradoxically is being shouldered primarily by taxpayers and the public (Quinones, 2015). A National Institute of Health study estimated that the total economic burden of prescription opioid overdose, abuse, and dependence was \$78.5 billion in 2013. Most of this was attributed to increased health care, treatment, and criminal justice costs (Florence, 2016). The total costs of the opioid crisis in 2015, according to estimates cited by the White House, was several times higher, at \$504 billion. Meanwhile a report from the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation found that the

opioid epidemic cost Massachusetts \$15.2 billion dollars in 2017 alone (Bebinger, 2018, Nov 14). The extent of the psychological and spiritual damages to individuals, families and communities cannot yet be fully appreciated, and are of course outside what can be quantified by a dollar figure. Despite this reality, Trump's promise to dismantle government oversight to unleash the powers of the private sector found widespread approval amongst the 'Oxy electorate.' As Quinones (2016, Nov 21) observed,

In many of the most affected regions, moreover, people, by and large, have taken as self-evident Ronald Reagan's dictum that "government is *the* problem" — the starkest threat to personal freedom. The private sector and the free market are, therefore, to be exalted; government starved. (This despite a deep reliance on government programs: Medicaid, Medicare, SSI, SSDI, worker's compensation, food stamps, welfare, farm subsidies, etc.) Confederate flags and 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment bumper stickers were common amid the Trump signs I saw.

The irony is that behind this drug plague is a story of how the private sector introduced the most serious widespread threat to personal freedom in America today – opiate addiction. All profits from the massive prescribing of narcotic pain pills have accrued to the private sector, mainly pharmaceutical companies; all costs of addiction to those pills, and then heroin, are borne by the public sector. Indeed, for years, about the only people fighting the opiate scourge, my research showed, were government employees: cops and prosecutors, public health nurses and CDC statisticians, county social workers, judges and ER doctors, DEA agents, coroners and others (para 18-20).

One would expect a crisis manufactured almost entirely by members of the corporate elite, reaping death and destruction across large swaths of the country to generate populist outrage. The opioid crisis has indeed enflamed populist sentiments, but the direction of this anger has been diverted from its origins in corporate greed and displaced onto Mexico and Central American immigrants. The rust belt areas most ravaged by the opioid epidemic, conveniently were also most negatively impacted by international free trade deals with Mexico, most notably NAFTA. Mexico therefore could be blamed simultaneously for gutting manufacturing in the rust belt and for flooding these same communities with cheap heroin.

Trump spoke directly to these anxieties in a Bangor, Maine speech, just weeks before the election.

A Trump Administration will secure and defend our borders. And yes, we will build a wall. A wall will not only keep out dangerous cartels and criminals, but it will also keep out the drugs and heroin poisoning our youth. ...if we are going to bring hope back to our communities, we not only have to solve our drug crisis but our economic crisis. The wealth has been raided from our country, leaving behind dilapidated communities, rusted out factories, and shattered dreams. At the center of our economic revival will be fixing our terrible trade deals. (FactBase, 2016, Oct 15)

Riding a wave of populist rage, especially towards Mexico and immigrant communities, Trump was able to introduce an exceptional form of governance—one that consolidated executive powers and advanced an aggressive neoliberal agenda by eliminating taxes on the wealthy and dismantling regulatory bodies vital to the protection of consumers and the environment. The recent rise of a Trumpism, though unique in many aspects shares parallels with previous right-wing and populist movements. Douglas Kellner, for example, has noted that Trump's brand of populism was sprung from a tradition of American demagogues claiming to defend the people against elites and the political establishment. As Kellner (2016) observes

Trump has his roots in an American form of populism that harkens back to figures like Andrew Jackson, Huey Long, George Wallace and, of course the American carnival barker and snake oil salesman. Like these classical American demagogues, Trump plays on the fears, grievances, and anger of people who feel they have been left behind by the elites. Like his authoritarian populist predecessors, Trump also scapegoats targets from Wall Street to a feared mass of immigrants allegedly crossing the border and pouring into the United States, overwhelming and outnumbering a declining White population (p. 22).

Others in the Frankfurt School, responding to the rise of fascist regimes in Europe developed critical theories of populism that provide important insights into the appeal of Trump's political agenda. In 1950, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer published an

edited volume called *The Authoritarian Personality*, which offered psychological and sociological explanations for how fascistic tendencies are developed (Adorno et. al, 1950). Based on interviews with American workers it was observed that the, “cumulative racist, antidemocratic, paranoid, and irrational sentiments in the case studies,” pointed towards an incipient rise of fascism in the United States. German Freudian Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, writing in 1955, and on the heels of Fascist, Nazi, and Stalinist movements, also attempted to develop a sketch of the ‘authoritarian profile.’ Fromm (1955) observed how the individual, made to feel “powerless and insignificant, projects all his human powers,” (p. 230) onto a ‘folk hero’ figure. This ‘folk hero’ promises to release the individual from feelings of alienation and despair, and in return expects unwavering loyalty—a form of worship Fromm (1955) refers to as “authoritarian idolatry.” Trump, in many ways is the great capitalist folk hero, promising to make America great again by bringing back jobs to the disaffected and disillusioned. Authoritarian idolatry is on full display at Trump rallies, where his bombastic diatribes against the media and political establishment are met with fervent jeers, cheers and chants from ardent groups of supporters. Trump’s political spectacle and folk hero persona is also grounded in his hybrid status as celebrity/politician—a tradition in American politics forged by such figures as Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

It is proposed here however, that Trump’s style of leadership can be best described as ‘authoritarian populism’ –a term first introduced by Stuart Hall—used to describe the emergent Thatcherite ideology in 1970’s U.K. society. Thatcher, like Trump ran on a law and order platform, promised to “make Britain great again” by promoting a nationalist economic agenda and harped on anxieties about white identity against the backdrop of a shifting ethnic landscape. As Hall (1979) observed with consternation,

No one seriously concerned with political strategies in the current situation can now afford to ignore “swing to the Right”. We may not yet understand its extents and its limits, its specific character, its causes and effects. We have so far—with one or two notable exceptions—failed to find strategies capable of mobilizing social forces strong enough in depth to turn its flank. But the tendency is hard to deny. It no longer looks like a temporary swing in the political fortunes, a short-term shift in the balance of forces (p. 14)

The above passage was written by Stuart Hall in 1979, but it very well could have been published more than 35 years later in 2016, as the United States took a dramatic “swing to the right,” with the unexpected victory of Donald Trump and the subsequent proliferation of radical alt-right discourses. Observing this shift to the right in the U.K, Hall et al. (1978) perceptively forecasted that the post-war political settlement would be replaced by an exceptional coercive state, armed with a new neoliberal economic agenda. In the context of post-war U.K. society, Thatcher and her brand of authoritarian populism, “successfully condenses a wide range of popular discontents with the post-war economic and political order and mobilizes them around an authoritarian, right wing solution to the current economic and political crisis in Britain” (Jessop Et al., 1984, p. 33). Authoritarian Populism, Hall observes is distinct from other repressive forms of social control—namely fascism—in that it operates through civil society and relies on willful rather than direct threats or coercion. As Hall (1979) explains,

What we have to explain is a move toward "authoritarian populism"—an exceptional form of the capitalist state—which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institution in place, and which at the same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent. This undoubtedly represents a decisive shift in the balance of hegemony (p. 15).

The rise of Trump can be viewed in matching terms. Trump, with strong echoes of Thatcher, offers an authoritarian, right wing solution to the perceived economic, political and social crises in the U.S. including rising crime, immigration, lack of meaningful employment,

the fraying of traditional social ties, the decline of white hegemony, and the scourge of addiction. With these striking parallels, a more detailed contextualization of authoritarian populism in the age of Trump is required. The following section attempts to provide this.

#### **A. From Thatcher to Trump: A Return of Authoritarian Populism**

The shocking defeat of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election, though a surprise to many, clearly illustrated the pull of populist appeals among American voters, especially in rural and suburban working-class communities. For many citizens in regions facing years of economic decline, job loss, fraying of community ties and an overall sense of being forgotten by the political elite in Washington (which for many Hillary Clinton embodies) has prevailed—and it is no surprise then that Trump’s promise to “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) became a welcome rallying cry. The rise of Trump’s regressive politics in rural US society are as Scoones et al (2018) notes, drawn from economic, social and psychological experiences that come with, “Deep inequalities, marginalisation and exclusion, persistent poverty, fractured identities and loss of esteem” (p. 5).

Concomitantly, Trump’s ‘America First’ doctrine, architected by self-described populist and leader of the alt-right, Steve Bannon, provided an unapologetic voice to middle and working-class white’s resentments and anxieties about their waning influence in the world. At raucous rallies along the campaign trail and well into his presidency, Trump attributed economic declines, urban and rural despair (including addiction), loss of security and social order to a racialized “Other”—often Mexican or Muslim immigrants. Trump’s politics of fear played well with his dedicated base and acted as the principle justifications for his campaign promises of building a wall along the southern border and banning Muslims from entering the United States. As Scoones et al (2018) explains, authoritarian populism,

...typically depicts politics as a struggle between ‘the people’ and some combination of malevolent, racialised and/or unfairly advantaged ‘Others’, at home or abroad or both.” It justifies interventions in the name of ‘taking back control’ in favour of ‘the people’, returning the nation to ‘greatness’ or ‘health’ after real or imagined degeneration attributed to those Others. Conflating a diverse and democratic people with images of dangerous and threatening crowds – ‘a brutal and ignorant mass’ (p.2-3).

Trump’s bombastic, xenophobic, and sexist rhetoric, though surely offensive to many conservatives, has been described by some right-wing factions as a welcome affront to the culture of political correctness, which is seen as an ideology orchestrated by a ‘liberal urban elite’. With the unification against ‘urban elites’ (of which Trump paradoxically is a part of) is the current brand of authoritarian populism is unmistakably rural and suburban in character, and also overwhelmingly white. As Scoones (2018) points out “...rural urban divides are increasingly framed in racial or ethnic terms” (p. 5). The combination of fear-based rhetoric with right wing nationalist overtones, appeals to white identity politics and relentless attacks against the ‘liberal elite media’ has led many political analysts to describe Trump’s management style as a unique brand of ‘authoritarian populism.’

Recently there has been a much discussed power shift towards right wing ethno-nationalist, authoritarian and ‘reactionary conservative populism’ in Europe, Asia, and parts of Latin America with the rise of Erdogan in Turkey, Duterte in the Philippines, and Mary Le Pen in France, Balsonaro in Brazil, and Trump in America. The current global shift towards authoritarianism, populism, and nationalism is propelled by radical rightwing ideologies, but as Banikowski (2017) points out populists movements “..are neither coterminous nor limited to the right” (p. S184).

Populism can be seen simultaneously as discourse, ideology, and a political movement. Though there is much, “predicated on the moral vilification of elites and the veneration of

ordinary people, who are seen as the sole legitimate source of political power” (Banikowski, 2017, p. S184), populist movements are not driven by one political force, and instead encompass a diverse set of ideologies, running the spectrum from far left to far-right (Rancière 2016). Even within each political party there are struggles to frame populist discourse. Reflecting the rise of Thatcher’s authoritarian populism, Hall (1979) explains, “The radical right does not appear out of thin air. It has to be understood in relation to alternative political formations attempting to occupy the same space. It is engaged in a struggle, within a dominant bloc, against both social democracy and the moderate wing of its own party” (p 16). Jessop et al (1984) also note that authoritarian populism, by nature holds many ambiguities and contradictory meanings. By coupling ‘authority’ and ‘people,’ the phrase conjoins two opposites, sometimes allowing the “authoritarian, disciplinarian, coercive pole,” to be emphasized and at other times emphasizing its “populist, popular, and consensual pole” (p. 35). While containing seemingly paradoxical components, authoritarian populism is unified in its ideological alignment against the elite establishment, as well as a malignant ‘Other’ seen as menace to ‘the people.’ As Morelock (2018) explains,

‘Authoritarian’ is to seek social homogeneity through coercion. ‘Populism’ is defining a section of the population as truly and rightfully ‘the people’ and aligning with this section against a different group identified as elites. Together, ‘authoritarian populism’ refers to the pitting of ‘the people’ against ‘elites’ in order to have the power to drive out, wipe out, or otherwise dominate Others who are not ‘the people.’ Generally, this involves social movements fueled by prejudice and led by charismatic leaders that seek to increase governmental force to combat difference. It is commonplace for governments under the direction of authoritarian populists to condense and centralize authority, so that more power rests in the hands of fewer people (p. xiv).

While populism has been most often associated with the right in the United States, left wing populism has a rich and complicated history. On the Left, populist movements often have roots in Marxist class-based struggles to upend exploitative relations of production. In



the United States in particular, Leftist populist movements have been relegated to the fringes of political discourse, or in many cases have been actively dismantled by the state. The Occupy movement, an ad hoc grassroots response to increasing concentration of wealth among the richest 1% in the United States, enjoyed an insurgent following after the September 2011 ‘occupation’ of Zuccoti Park in Manhattan to protest corporate greed on Wall Street and in global financial systems. The ‘occupy’ or ‘99%’ movement quickly spread to over 600 communities across the country and many more around the globe—its spread driven by a nebulous, decentralized and non-hierarchical group of media savvy young people with varying and often conflicting prerogatives and demands (Gautney, 2011, Oct 10). The ideological beginnings of the movement are often traced back to Kalle Lasn, co-founder of *Adbusters Magazine*, a Vancouver, B.C.-based non-for-profit publication with the mission of ‘jamming’ the corporate advertisement apparatus, environmental activism and progressive and radical left politics. The following is the *Adbusters* manifesto featured on its website:

Join us to take down broken banks and break the backs of big business. To hold corrupt politicians accountable and wake up a thoughtless, complacent culture; quit following and retweeting, start thinking and talking for ourselves again. To fight the mental takeover of an ever-present ad industry; dream up a self of your own, live it but never buy or \$ell it. Join us; come together and commit to the sole goal of fucking up every system that keeps you from living your dreams (Manifesto, n.d.).

Although the Occupy movement has enjoyed some resurgence lately with activist interventions against Trump’s immigration agenda, including ‘Occupy ICE’, the influence of the group has waned considerably since the movement was galvanized in 2011. Widespread campaigns from conservative politicians and news outlets such as Fox News to discredit the Occupy Movement, state interventions from the police to forcibly remove protestors from encampments, and lack of centralized leadership, ultimately weakened the group’s political leverage (White, 2017, Aug 28).

Bernie Sanders' unlikely surge in the 2016 democratic primaries, however, demonstrated the sustained appeal of Liberal Populism among the American electorate. Most polls leading up to the 2016 primaries and election showed Bernie Sanders easily beating then Republican hopeful, and self-styled authoritarian populist candidate, Donald Trump. Sanders candidacy, like the Occupy movement was carried by strong public resentments against the "billionaire class" also referred to as the 1%, with Sanders promising to reform Wall Street, reduce income and wealth inequality, to get big money out of politics, and to slash college tuition and debt. Despite the resounding appeal of his populist agenda shown in early polling, centrist and veteran politician, Hillary Clinton, was nominated as Democratic candidate at the Democratic National Convention, through what many have called a corrupt process (White, 2017, Aug 28).

Whether or not Donald Trump's victory can be attributed to the appeal of his right-wing authoritarian populism has been a topic of fierce debate. Analysts tend to emphasize either the economic or racial character of Trump's platform, but there were many reasons people chose to vote for Trump, just like there was, "No single or ideological or organizational basis of Thatcherism" (Jessop, 1984, p. 43). Some scholars have criticized Hall's theory of authoritarian populism for tending to "homogenize the impact and universalize the appeal of Thatcherism" (Jessop et al. 1984). Hall's view of Thatcherism, however was always informed by conjunctural processes—dynamic interactions between ideological and base economic factors. In PTC, Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate how the, "general shift in the seventies towards the coercive state, law and order society, open repression," was not prompted by the economic basis alone, but by a complex interplay between the state, the press, the judiciary, the police, as well as socioeconomic factors. The rupture of the post war

social-democratic hegemonic settlement was not caused by any single factor—it must be understood through analyzing interactions between multiple levels of determinacy.

One salient factor that is crucial to Hall et al.'s (1978) analysis of the mugging epidemic in the late 1970's, is the role of race. It impossible to disentangle the American political experience from histories of race and racism, especially in the context of the war on drugs.

Much scholarly attention has been placed on the production of black and brown subjectivities through the war on drugs, and deservedly so. Recently, however, increasing scholarly focus has been placed on the study of whiteness. This is not to center whiteness, but to interrogate how privilege functions to produce subjectivities. In the context of this project, it is proposed that a theorization of whiteness is required to understand the various discursive responses to the opioid epidemic—a crisis which has produced a number of different anxieties about race, and in particular about white identity. The opioid crisis and its related discourses including those about the border and immigration, public health, and criminal justice, it is proposed here, serve to defend and maintain white hegemony. The following section charts the theorization of whiteness from various critical traditions.

### **B. Whiteness as Ideology**

Critical interrogation of whiteness and white supremacy has a long history preceding the recent explosion of literature in whiteness studies. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, W.E.B. DuBois was delivering sharp critique of the superior status conferred to white folks in American society. In *The Souls of White Folk*, published in 1910, W.E.B. DuBois proclaims that, “Everything considered, the title to the universe claimed by White Folk is faulty,” —a direct indictment of the ideology of white supremacy (p. 454). The whiteness as greatness narrative that undergirds the white supremacy ideology, DuBois (1996 [1910]) determined was

founded in the European inventions of imperialism and colonialism. The paradox is that European empires owe their foundation to ‘darker’ civilizations in Africa, Asia, and the Mediterranean, leading DuBois (1996 [1910]) to ask rhetorically, “Why, then is Europe great?” (p. 459). The conflation of whiteness and greatness has more recently propelled social critics to assert that Trump’s Make America *Great* Again slogan really translates to Make America *White* Again. With these recent challenge to white supremacy, the pleas of DuBois are strongly echoed, demonstrating the indelible mark he has left on the study of ‘whiteness’ as a sustained ideological framework. As Rabaka (2006) points out,

Long before the recent discourse on critical race theory and critical white studies, DuBois called into question white superiority and white privilege, and the possibility of white racelessness and/or white racial neutrality and universality. He was one of the first theorists to chart the changes in race relations from de jure to de facto forms of white supremacy (p. 2)

DuBois also extended on Marxist theory to map interactions between race and class, long before many contemporary race scholars, such as Stuart Hall and Alexander Saxton. In *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), apart from lamenting the failed alliances between the black working class and the white working class after reconstruction, DuBois also observed how whiteness functioned as social capital (a kind of discursive wage) to give white opportunities and advantages unavailable to blacks, even of similar socioeconomic status. As (Roedigger, 2007) points out DuBois advanced the,

...the idea that the pleasures of whiteness could function as a 'wage' for white workers. That is, status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships, North and South. "White workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as 'not slaves' and as 'not Blacks' (p. 13)

Following the tradition of DuBois, Roedigger (2007) provides a detailed historiographical account of how the ‘white-worker’ develops as a “self-conscious social category” (p. 23), primarily as an ontological opposition to blackness, while chronicling the shifting definitions of whiteness and the white-working class, from Settler Colonialism and Republicanism before 1800, Industrial period, to the post emancipation period. Historians such as Roedigger (*The Wages of Whiteness*, 1991), literary critics such as Toni Morrison (*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 1992) and feminist scholars such as Ruth Frankenburg (*White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, 1993) have all contributed to the development of an interdisciplinary understanding of whiteness. Interest in “whiteness” as an explanatory and conceptual framework, as a result, increased substantially in the 1990’s and early 2000’s (McMahon, 2015). Common amongst most recent contributions to whiteness literature is the idea that the discursive formation of white racial superiority has been leveraged to sustain the political, social, and economic domination of whites. Some charge however, that whiteness studies employs reductionist tendencies in its imagination of the white working class as a monolithic and static entity. Although the labels of “white” and “working class” are often used interchangeably, and in conjunction, neither maintain stable meanings, and have occupied multiple semantic spaces across time and geographic location (Beider, 2013). For example, Beider (2013) claims that the white-working class has been consistently reduced to a, “fixed cultural identity marking them as the ‘left behind group’, resistant to change and hostile to multiculturalism and immigration” (p. 335). Hall (1996) in his analysis of race, similarly cautions that *blackness* cannot be explained as a, “pre-given unified ideological subject” (p.433). To understand how race and racism work at the level of ideology, Hall (1996) draws

from Gramsci's ideas on the contradictions, struggles, and uncertainties that define hegemony and common sense. As Hall (1996) notes, "subordinated ideologies are necessarily and inevitably contradictory" (p. 439), illustrating that ideological struggles not only play out at the level of structures and institutions, but also on the level of the individual and the self. For example, Hall (1996) describes how racism functions internally such that the victim of racism often assumes, "the very racist ideologies that imprison and define them" (p. 440). With the notion of hegemony Hall (1987; 1996) is able to get at the complex ideological contradictions that sustain experiences of race and racism. Hall often talks about race as a 'floating signifier' and by this he is attempting to destabilize fixed and essential understandings of racial categories. Hall (1996) sees the construction of meaning as a process "without guarantees"—one that is open to constant negotiation between dominant hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses—and it is within this contested ideological terrain, or what Hall refers to as the "dirty semiotic space," where race takes on multiple and often messy set of intersubjective meanings. In the domain of meaning, for Hall (1996), there is no fixity of referent—and race in particular cannot be referentially tethered to predeterminancies, despite attempts by geneticists and the pseudo-sciences, such as phrenology to understand race on the level of biology. Hall rejects the idea of race as a given category that can deliver a set of guarantees about behavior, psychology, and physiology. For Hall (1996), fixed, preordained notions of race results from "...mistaking what is historical, and cultural for what is natural, biological and genetic" (p.472). Using the semiotic field to dislodge race from stable biological categories can thus extend our understanding of how self and identity are dynamically shaped by and constitutive of culture, and history. This does not mean that race floats outside of meaning, nor does it suggest that is trapped entirely inside

the discursive. In seeking a conceptualization of race that “has no guarantees in nature “(p. 443) we can think of race as a discursive formation that on the level of representation has real connections to material conditions. Simultaneously, in moving beyond race as “biologically constituted category” (p.472) we can think of identity as a “process of identification” or how one comes to identify with a particular category and what it has come to represent.

For Hall, Black popular culture, although often described through a very narrow definition, does not mean one thing, and thus cannot be thought of in unitary terms. Black culture, according to Hall (1996) is constituted by the, “the extraordinary diversity of subject positions” (p. 443) occupying a “contradictory space” where many meanings are possible simultaneously. With more specificity, we can examine Hall’s own autobiographical accounts of identity formation as a “black subject” to understand how race can simultaneously subsume diverse and contradictory meanings. In describing his own intellectual trajectory Hall often begins with his Caribbean roots/routes. Hall’s accounts of his early home life in Jamaica, reveal how notions of Blackness in a “coloured family” were contested through oppositional and contradictory understandings of race. Young Hall, self-described as a “shade too dark,” was raised by a mother that was enamored with the colonial ‘mother country’, and grew up with a sister, whose unsanctioned affair with a “black” doctor, drove her to have a psychological breakdown, from which she never fully recovered. From this we can see that Hall’s interactions with blackness are varied and contradictory, and his position—as a British scholar of African, European, and East Indian origin shows how race cannot be tethered to a singular unifying definition. Rather than playing out on the level of biology, race for Hall personally and politically exists on the level of lived experiences, language and discourse. Hall’s own Diasporic identity also shows us how understandings of race changes according

to place and context. With Hall's move to the Oxford, he was in some sense the perfect colonial subject, but with this migration his notion of the colony shifted, as did his notion of self and subjectivity. In the U.K. he was no longer part of the elite, privileged class, and became the marginalized "black subject" which he stood in opposition to back in Jamaica. Having shifted between cultures and subjectivities, Hall's notions of race and identity are hybrid, Diasporic, unsettled and destabilized, and therefore it is not useful to think of his identity in terms of singular origins—for example, as a "Caribbean Intellectual."

Hall (1996) also attempts to deconstruct ideas of the "Essential black subject" (p.443) advanced by Subaltern and critical race scholars. For example, Hall (1996) sees Gayatri Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism" perpetuating the idea that postcolonial subjects feel a collective and unified experience of "epistemic violence." According to Hall (1996), through these essentialisms, "we valorize, by inversion, the racism we are trying to deconstruct" (p.443). What Hall finds problematic are understandings of race that construct subject positions in terms of either/or binary categories. For Hall, race is constructed through intersubjective hybrid negotiations, and thus more useful to Hall is Frantz Fanon's idea of the "The self as other" advanced in *White Masks, Black Bodies*.

Although race can be understood abstractly at the levels of ideology and discourse, the systems of representing race have real and felt political and material effects. The system of representing immigrants as criminal, for example, has real effects on how law enforcement and the judiciary interact with black and brown communities, as Hall et al. (1978) have demonstrated quite profoundly in PTC. At the level of representation, race is an arbitrary sign that has been actively tethered to very particular meanings. These meanings in turn effect how people are understood and treated as political subjects, producing what Hall referred to



as the “politics of representation.” Hall, famously has proclaimed that ‘people are treated the way they are represented.’

Although Hall certainly saw Thatcher and her conservative coalition, as an essentializing force in defining Blacks and Asians in terms their opposition to “Englishness,” Hall also identifies similarly reductionist tendencies in progressive political movements. As Hall (1996) has pointed out “...once it is fixed, we are tempted to use ‘black’ as sufficient in itself to guarantee the progressive character of the politics we fight under the banner...” (p. 472). Although written prior to the Obama presidency, this statement seems to speak directly to the racial politics in the era of the first Black President. For many, Obama’s ‘blackness’ guaranteed of a politics of resistance and fairness, while representing a dynamic rupture of the neoliberal Thatcherite political settlement. However, after eight years, it became evident that Obama’s race gave no guarantees of a progressive politics. To the contrary, many have argued that Obama advanced the same policies of his neoliberal and neoconservative predecessors.

The Obama presidency thus provides a cautionary tale for progressives about the value of understanding race as a floating signifier. Reducing Obama’s race to essential characteristics, even if they were positive, created an illusion of guarantees. If we were to take heed to Stuart Hall’s insights, we would have learned that race in fact provides no guarantees.

Notwithstanding noble attempts to unpack social constructions of race, academics and activists are contending with deep histories of problematic reductionisms in racial discourses. Discourse tying blacks and Latinxs to criminality, for example, are steeped in histories of colonialism, scientific racism and white supremacy—histories which have defined the field of Criminology and the criminal justice system in America for decades.

LaFree and Russel (1993) argue that from its birth in the 1890's, American criminology, has always been entangled with race and defined by racism. Early etiological explanations of crime, for instance attempted to link criminal behaviors to genetic predispositions, and it was determined through now debunked 'science' that blacks were more biologically prone to develop criminal tendencies. Despite the growth of sociological perspectives on criminology that suggest crime is driven by complex cultural and socio-cognitive factors, media representations continue to create a 'natural' connection between people of color and criminal behavior. The role of media in propagating racial stereotypes about crime has been well documented. Past research, for example, has determined that blacks are statistically overrepresented as perpetrators of crime in local television news, compared to crime reports (Dixon and Linz, 2000), while whites are overrepresented as victims of violent crimes, and as police officers (Dixon, Azocar, and Casas, 2003). Blacks and Latinos are also more likely to be portrayed as lawbreakers than defendants in television news, while whites were more likely to be portrayed as defendants, when compared to Department of Justice crime statistics (Dixon and Linz, 2006). Though there are few empirical studies that link exposure to TV representations and real-world evaluations of race and crime, Gilliam, Valentino and Beckman (2002) suggest that, "...consuming the persistent overrepresentation of blacks in crime-related news stories strengthens the cognitive association between blacks and criminality in the mind of the consumers..." (p. 616). In support of this claim, Gilliam, Valentino and Beckman (2002) found that when exposed to racial stereotypes in the news, whites living in racially homogenous neighborhoods expressed more punitive views about crime and punishment. Whites, meanwhile, who lived in racially heterogenous neighborhoods were unaffected by racial stereotypes, or even endorsed less punitive views

on crime. This research might imply that whites with preexisting perceptions about race and crime tend to segregate into racially homogenous neighborhoods, but it could also suggest that interaction across races can mitigate some of the harmful impacts of racial stereotypes in the news.

Recent research documenting the overrepresentation of Blacks and Latinxs as perpetrators of crime, further validates contemporary applications of Stuart Hall's theory of how media discourses contribute to the racialized construction of moral panics. In *Incarcerating the crisis: Freedom struggles and the rise of the neoliberal state*, Camp (2016) provides a comprehensive account how of mass criminalization of Blacks and Latinxs, the prison-industrial complex, and media representations act together to form "neoliberal racial and security regimes" (p. 4). Denigrating media representations of racial upheaval against state hegemony in Watts, Detroit, and the Attica Prison in upstate New York, and Katrina ravaged New Orleans, Camp (2016) contends were used to justify mass incarceration and criminalization, or what he calls "racialized crisis management" (p. 4).

#### **D. The "Drug Infested Den": Immigration, Race and the Opioid Crisis**

Trump's approach to immigration and the border employs many facets of 'racialized crisis management' while his rhetoric reinforces many of the dominant tropes around race and criminality that have been repeated consistently throughout U.S. history. On many occasions during his campaign, debates, press conferences, has espoused rhetoric linking immigrants to criminality. In his own attempts to manage the 'crisis at the border' and the opioid crisis, Trump has employed several racist tropes.

Remarks published by *The Washington Post* from Trump's January 27, 2017 phone call with then Mexico President Enrique Peña Nieto, reveal the President's understanding of his

success in many New Hampshire counties. In a diatribe that shifts between threats of tariffs on Mexican goods, vows to help fight “tough hombres,” and demands that Mexico fund the border wall, among other issues, a remarkable claim was made by Trump: That the President had won New Hampshire *because* it is a “drug infested den.” (Stack, 2017, Aug 3). It should be noted that Hilary Clinton, in fact won the state of New Hampshire, but Trump did win in many counties that had voted for Obama for two election cycles. The following is an excerpt from a transcript of the call:

...we have the drug lords in Mexico that are knocking the hell out of our country. They are sending drugs to Chicago, Los Angeles, and to New York. Up in New Hampshire – I won New Hampshire because New Hampshire is a drug-infested den – is coming from the southern border. So we have a lot of problems with Mexico farther than the economic problem. We are becoming a drug-addicted nation and most the drugs are coming from Mexico or certainly from the southern border. (Stack, 2017, Aug 3).

The characterization of New Hampshire as a “drug infested den,” shocked and angered many, who feared it would damage the state’s reputation as a land of rugged mountain ranges, ski resorts, and “live free or die” ethos. While hyperbolic, derogatory and irresponsible, the portrayal of New Hampshire, “as a drug-infested den” does reflect the common perceptions of the opioid crisis in the Granite state. New Hampshire has the nation’s highest per capita overdose death rate from the synthetic opioid, fentanyl, and in a 2017 poll, more than 53% of New Hampshire adults cited “Drug Misuse” as the most important problem facing the state, with “Jobs/Economy,” a distant second at 11%. (Smith, Azem, and McKinley, 2017, May 9). What is perhaps more stunning than the “drug infested” label, are the discursive ties between addiction crisis and Trump’s success with voters in the state. Trump’s claim that he won in New Hampshire *because* of the drug crisis, creates a striking correlation between conservative support and opioid addiction.

Just a few months after the tapes of Trump’s “drug infested den” comments were released by the *Washington Post*; the President made a much-publicized trip to New Hampshire to address the opioid crisis. On March 18, 2018, in front of a packed crowd of ardent supporters at Manchester Community College in Manchester, NH, Trump delivered scripted remarks about the opioid crisis, but also took the opportunity to rhetorically link opioids to immigration, DACA, border security, and sanctuary cities. In a now controversial statement, referencing a Dartmouth College Study, Trump claimed that the sanctuary city of Lawrence, Massachusetts is “one of the primary sources of fentanyl in six New Hampshire counties” (Ortiz, 2018, Mar 19). However, the study’s principle investigator, Lisa Marsh has publicly disputed Trump’s interpretation, claiming that the study was preliminary and “was not intended to be definitive information on drug trafficking.” What is also absent from Trump’s analysis is that the study is based on qualitative data from surveys of only 20 drug users of the 30,000 estimated to be in New Hampshire, and Lawrence was just one of many cities named by the study’s subjects. Boston, Haverhill, Holyoke, Methuen, Lowell, Springfield, Massachusetts and Springfield, Vermont were also named as primary sources of fentanyl. Of the locations named, only Boston and Lawrence currently have the designation of sanctuary cities. The study also cites low per capita spending on addiction treatment, rural economic degradation, and doctors prescribing pain relievers at a rate of twice the national average, as factors contributing to the crisis in New Hampshire (Annear, 2018, Mar 20). Here are Trump’s full remarks attempting to establishing a connection between the opioid crisis in New Hampshire and sanctuary cities in Massachusetts.

My administration is also confronting things called “sanctuary cities” that shield dangerous criminals. And every day, sanctuary cities release illegal immigrants and drug dealers, traffickers, and gang members back into our communities. They’re protected by

these cities. And you say, “What are they doing?” They’re safe havens for just some terrible people. Some terrible people. And they’re making it very dangerous for our law enforcement officers. You see it all the time.

As the people of New Hampshire have learned firsthand, ending sanctuary cities is crucial to stopping the drug addiction crisis. And your governor, who is great — the numbers are going down in New Hampshire. I don’t know if you’ve seen it, but the numbers are going down. Chris, we were just — stand up, Chris. (Applause.) It’s really one of the few bright spots where the numbers actually are going down, and that’s a tremendous achievement. Thank you, Chris. (Applause.)

According to a recent Dartmouth study, the sanctuary city of Lawrence, Massachusetts is one of the primary sources of fentanyl in six New Hampshire counties. ICE recently arrested 15 MS-13 gang members — these are not good people, folks. Okay? These are bad, bad people. They don’t use guns. They’d rather use knives because it’s more painful and it takes longer. These are bad people — in Boston, Massachusetts, which is a place where you have sanctuary cities.

I’m repeating my call on Congress to block funds for sanctuary cities and to close the deadly loopholes that allow criminals back into our country and into our country in the first place. (Applause.) (Remarks by President Trump on Combatting the Opioid Crisis, 2018, Mar 19)

Trump’s references to “deadly loopholes” discursively tether immigration to overdose deaths in white-dominated New Hampshire. These statements contain obvious racial overtones steeped in long standing myths linking black and brown people to criminality. Concomitantly, by attaching blame to immigrant communities for a crisis that has claimed mostly rural ‘white victims’ Trump is activating latent racial anxieties to build justification for draconian immigration policies, including blocking federal funding to sanctuary cities. Through this, responsibility for the opioid crisis is removed from wealthy pharmaceutical executives who manufactured and aggressively marketed dangerous opioids and displaced onto poor immigrant communities in the sanctuary cities of Lawrence and Boston. Trump’s claims, however, have not gone without challenges. The Mayor of Boston, Marty Walsh, responded directly to Trump’s statements, asserting that the president had “...criminalized

both our immigrant community and those suffering from substance abuse all in one speech...”

Lawrence, Massachusetts Mayor Dan Rivera also shot back at Trump for, “smiling in New Hampshire’s face, after calling them a ‘drug-infested den,’” and for, “trafficking in pain and divisiveness, creating boogiemens where we need solutions” (Ortiz, 2018, Mar 19). The boogiemens that Rivera is referring to are, of course black and brown people, often from immigrant communities—‘folk devils’ that pose an existential threat to whiteness, and as an extension “greatness.” There has been, as exhibited by rhetoric from local politicians, fierce challenges to Trump’s racialized depictions of New Hampshire’s drug crisis and its origins.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **FRAMING THE CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF LOCAL TV NEWS DISCOURSES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE**

### **A. Introduction**

This chapter examines the various ways in which the opioid crisis in New Hampshire is framed by the news media. Through investigation of archival records, evaluation of political discourses in campaign materials, and analysis of closed captions from the WMUR news network, this chapter attempts to build bring critical awareness to the various ways in which New Hampshire's opioid crisis is represented as a social reality. Employing facets of the conjunctural analysis methodology utilized by Hall et al. (1978) this chapter also attempts to map out the complexities of the opioid crisis, as it plays out through dynamic interactions between the state, the press, the public and the judiciary. All of these factors are considered in context of the unique geopolitical specificity of New Hampshire, in the politically tense period leading up to the 2016 presidential election. Under these exceptional conditions, an intersectional understanding to race, class, gender, and politics is also required. This chapter thus attempts to evaluate how news representations of the opioid crisis reflect, reinforce, and/or challenge socioeconomic, racial, gendered political realities in local, regional and national contexts.

#### **1. Battleground: Granite State**

Unlike West Virginia, where the opioid crisis has ravaged the state's poor white population, New Hampshire is relatively prosperous. In fact, in 2016, New Hampshire had the highest median income of any state in the nation (New Hampshire Public Radio, 2019, Sep 14). While New Hampshire also led the nation in median income, it also topped all states



in per capita deaths from the synthetic opioid, fentanyl (New Hampshire Opioid Summary, 2019). A large proportion of overdose deaths from fentanyl occur in New Hampshire's small metropolitan centers, such as Concord and Manchester, and many of the casualties of the epidemic are young men and women from well-to-do families (New Hampshire Drug Monitoring Initiative, 2018). All of this challenges the popular perception that the opioid issue only plagues poor whites in rural locales. The reality is that in New Hampshire, unlike West Virginia, the opioid epidemic has impacted middle class suburban families, some with close political ties.

However, despite promises from politicians and the positive coverage by the news media, the reality on the ground in New Hampshire is that resources for addicts have typically been scarce, angering many families with political clout. In fact, the state ranked second to last behind Texas in access to treatment programs. One of the reasons often cited for New Hampshire's lagging response, is that the state does not collect sales tax, leading to severe funding shortages for treatment programs and other addiction services (Seelye, 2018, Jan 21).

Despite the explosive growth of the Internet, one of the primary channels for up-to-date information and news about New Hampshire's opioid crisis, is still local television and WMUR is the Granite State's premiere source for local news. WMUR TV is an ABC affiliate located in Manchester, New Hampshire, about 45 miles north of Boston. and owned by Hearst Television, a subsidiary of the Hearst Corporation. WMUR broadcasts throughout the Boston-Manchester television market, which reaches 2.4 million households according to Nielson ratings, making it the nation's 8<sup>th</sup> largest market. WMUR has operated since 1954 when it became the first television station in New Hampshire (Local Television Market

Universe Estimates, 2019). Each week the station broadcasts 30.5 hours of locally produced newscasts and is well known for producing presidential primary debates for ABC News and CNN (WMUR, 2019). As a battleground state and home of presidential primaries, WMUR is also known for hosting many political ads during campaign season. According to a University of New Hampshire study, WMUR accounted for approximately two thirds of the purchased advertising time for primary candidates (Wallstin, 2015, Dec 16). WMUR has also been recognized for its investigative reporting on the opioid crisis in New Hampshire. New Hampshire's opioid crisis was not only a prominent topic of national discussions around the 2016 election, it also frequently figured into local politics and election campaigns. For example, dozens of political ads for both Democratic and Republican candidates for New Hampshire's senate seats and governorship included prominent mention of the opioid crisis. Analysis of google search data also indicate that the opioid crisis was on the minds of New Hampshire voters. According to Google trends, New Hampshire was only second to Massachusetts for number of times the search term "opioid" was entered during the key political period between Nov 8, 2014 to Nov 8, 2016 (see figure 1). During the same period New Hampshire topped all states for number of searches for the term "heroin" followed by three other New England states (Vermont, Massachusetts and Maine) and Ohio (see figure 2). New Hampshire only followed North Dakota for number of searches for the term "fentanyl" (see figure 3), and only followed West Virginia for number of searches including the term "overdose" (see figure 4).

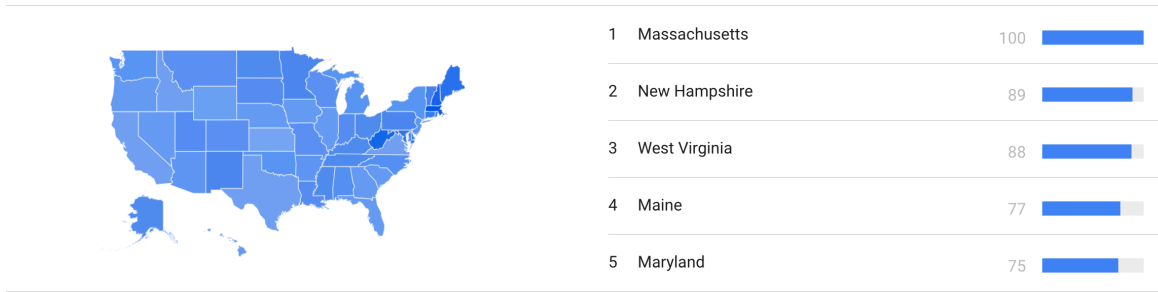


Figure 1: Google search queries for the term “opioid” by state

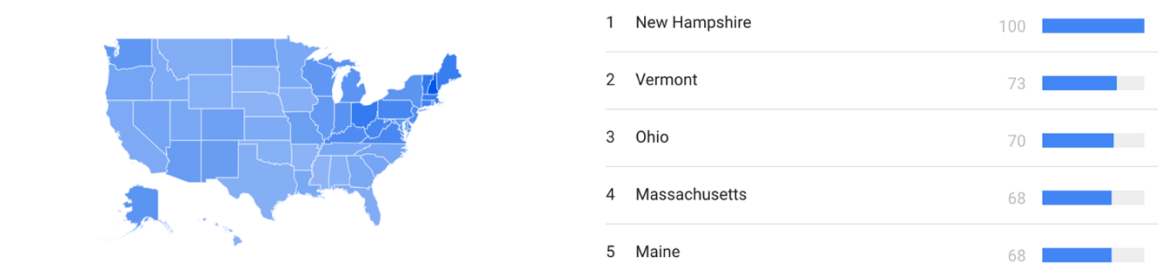


Figure 2: Google search queries for the term “heroin” by state

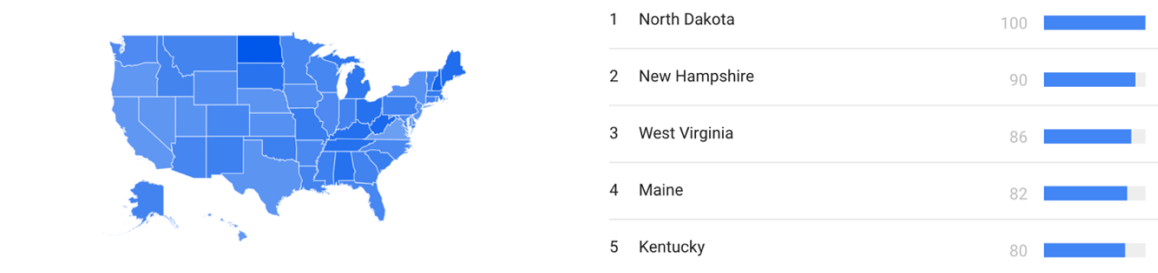


Figure 3: Google search queries for the term “fentanyl” by state

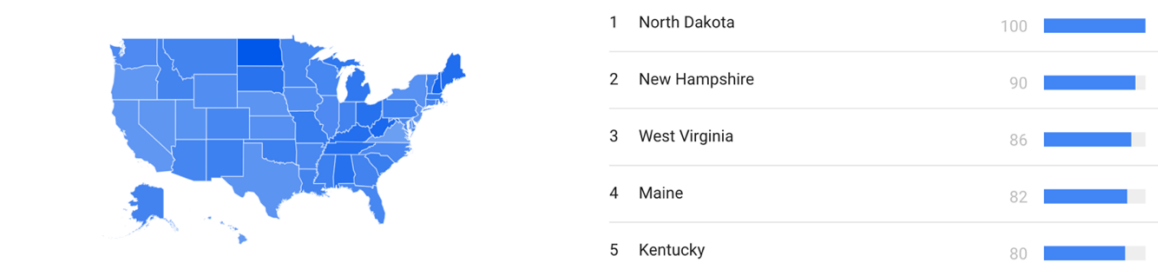


Figure 4: Google search queries for the term “overdose” by state

Nationally, there also seemed to be a spike in interest in the term “opioid” just before the 2016 election. The graphic below shows interest over time between the Nov 8, 2014 and Nov 8, 2016 (see figure 5). There is an evident increase in interest during the months of April, May and June 2016, though it is unknown precisely what caused this increase. During the 15-year period between 2004 and 2019 there is also a marked increase in interest in the term “opioid” after 2016. Peak interest was reached in Oct 2018, just before the 2018 midterm elections (see figure 6).

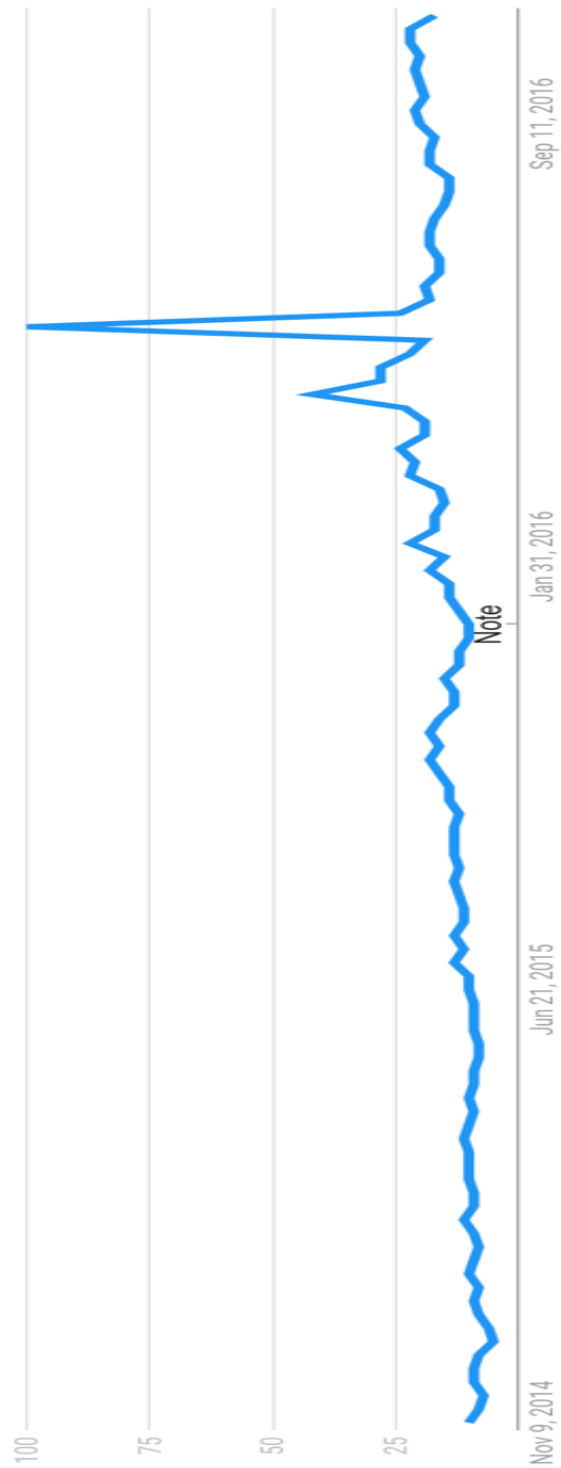


Figure 5: Google search queries for term “opioid” (Nov 8, 2014 to Nov 8, 2016)

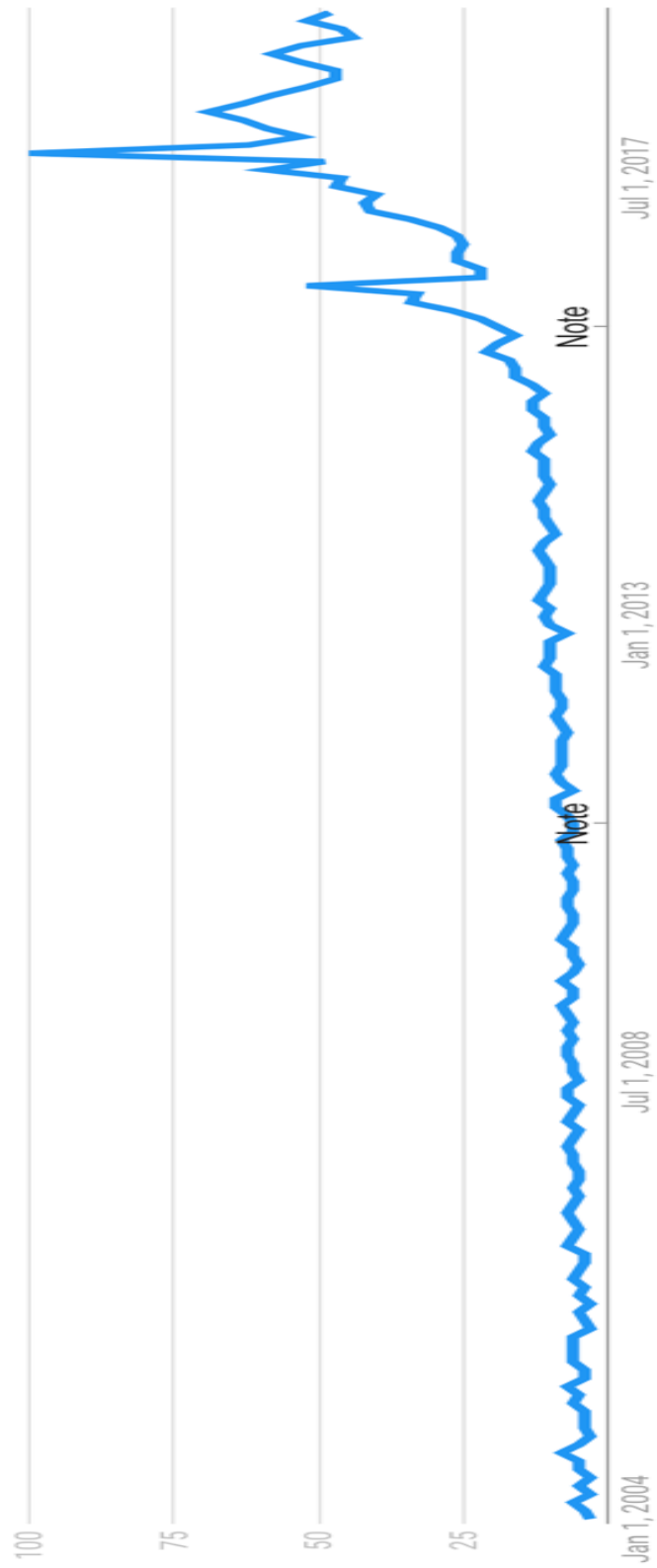


Figure 6: Google search queries for term “opioid” (2004- 2019)

Meanwhile figures 7, 8, 9 below show the percent of all airtime devoted to opioids on the three major national cable news networks (CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC). The graphs are generated from algorithms developed by the GDELT project and measure mentions of terms per 15 second using thousands of hours of footage logged on the online news and information repository, Archive.org between 6/5/2009 and 9/26/2018. From the archival data, the software is able to determine a proportion of overall airtime devoted to an issue. The graphs show that among all three cable news networks, there was a marked increase in overall proportion of airtime with mentions of the term “opioid.” The increase in all three cases appears start around mid 2016, peaks in late 2017 and weans off thereafter. Coverage with mentions of opioids, at its peak still only represents about 2 percent of overall airtime. This shows that although there is increase in opioid-related coverage leading up to the 2016 election, and in the early days of Trump’s presidency, this still represents a small fraction of overall airtime.

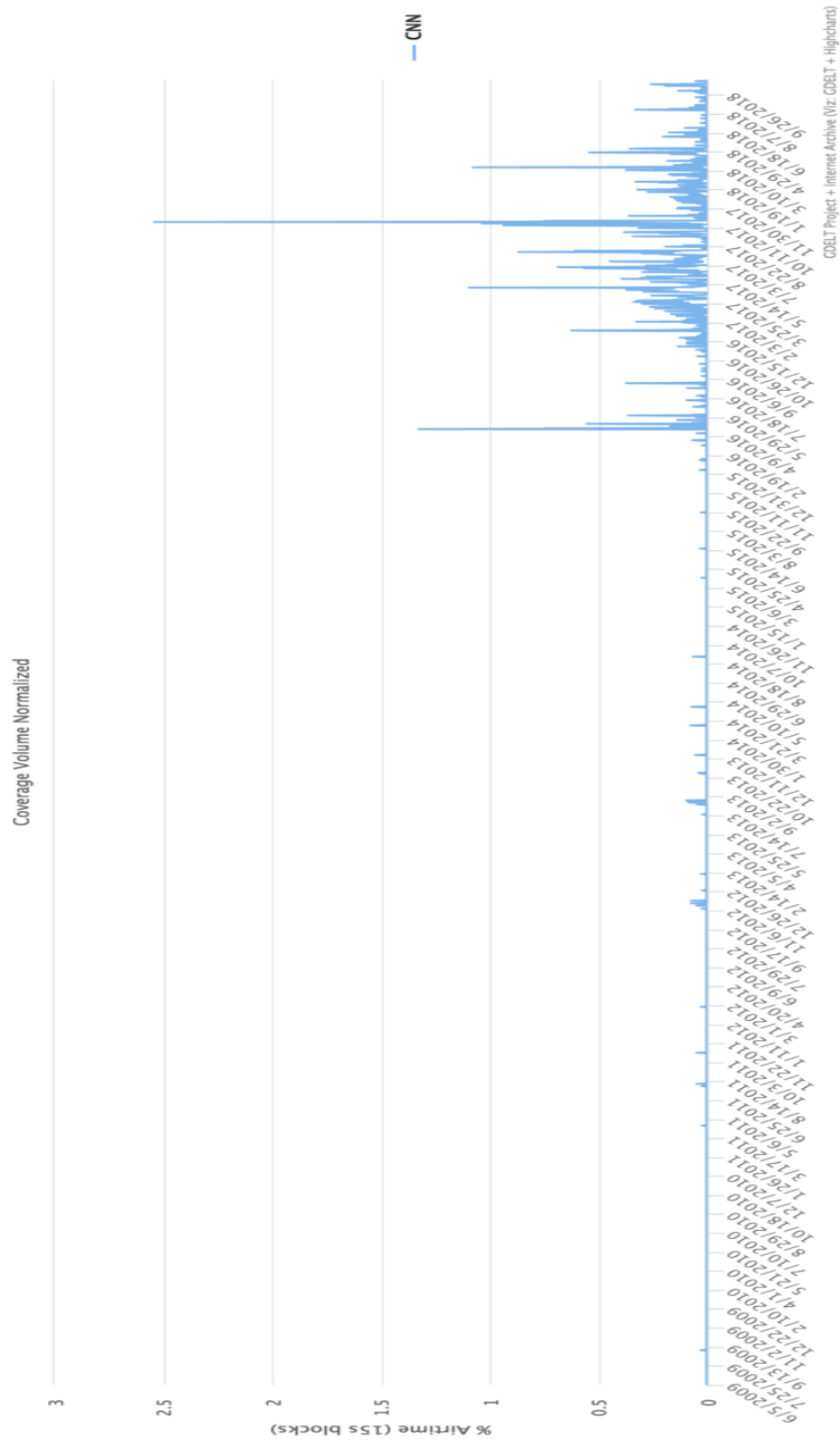


Figure 7: Percent of all news programming airtime on CNN devoted to opioids measured by mentions per 15 second block (6/5/2009-9/26/2018).



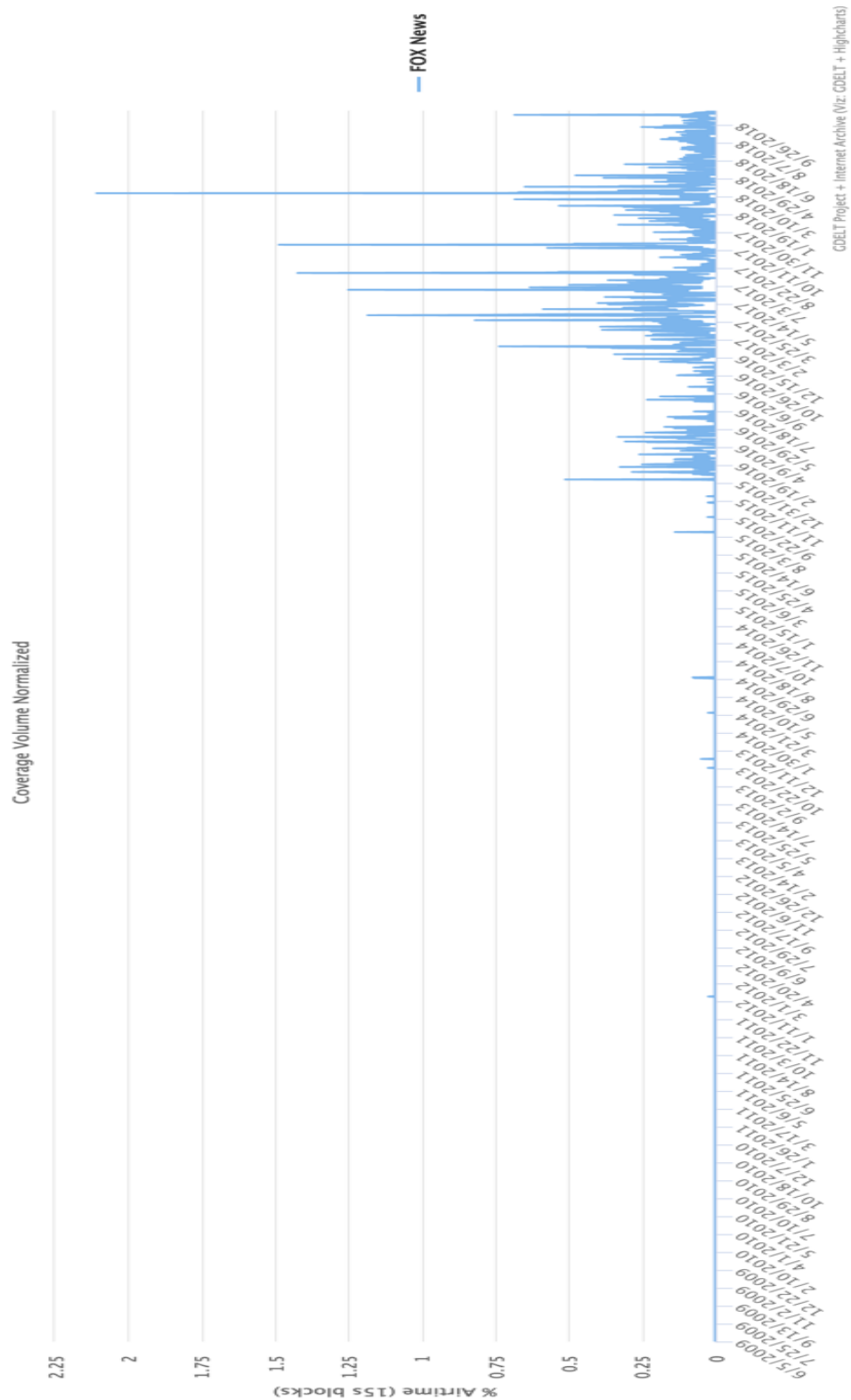


Figure 8: Percent of all news programming airtime on Fox News devoted to opioids measured by mentions per 15 second block (6/5/2009-9/26/2018).

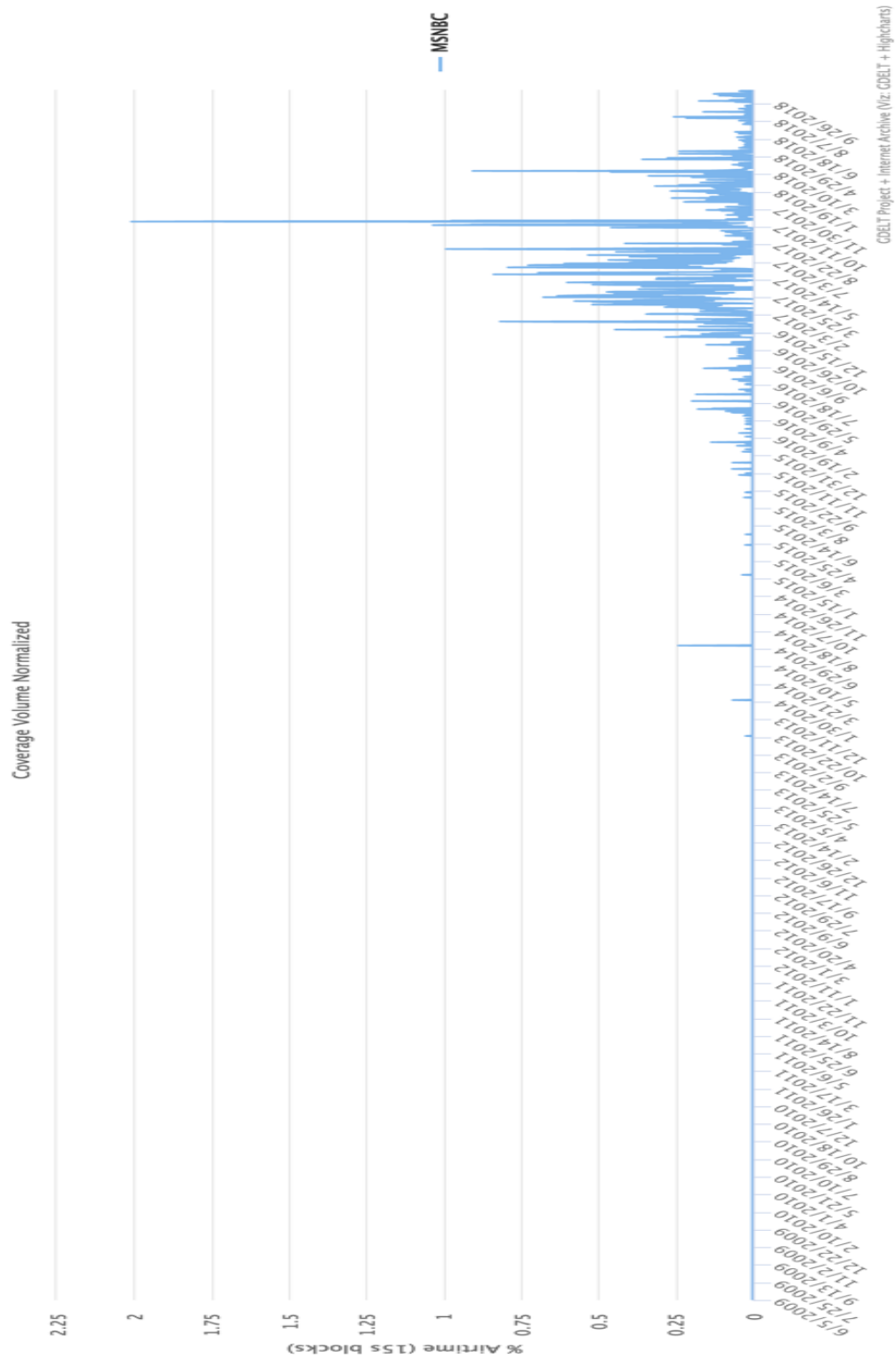


Figure 9: Percent of all news programming airtime on MSNBC devoted to opioids measured by mentions per 15 second block (6/5/2009-9/26/2018).

The figures above show a clearly marked increase in attention to the opioid crisis both increased, and in the regional context of New Hampshire and Massachusetts in the months leading up to 2016 election and immediately following. In New Hampshire, the opioid crisis was particularly important issue leading up to the 2016 election. According to a WMUR Granite State study conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey center, drug abuse was the number one issue on voters' minds (43 percent), easily topping the economy (21 percent) and health care (7 percent) (Drug Abuse the Most Important Issue Facing NH, 2017, Feb 14).

Local politicians as well as aspiring presidential candidates, looking to pick up a primary victory in New Hampshire, have increasingly leveraged public angst about the opioid crisis to win favorability among voters. Many political ads addressing the opioid crisis follow a nearly identical narrative. The story of a white suburban "victim" who succumbs to addiction often sets the stage for politicians' proposals to end the crisis, which overwhelmingly encourage treatment over incarceration. Revealingly, the rhetoric of Democrats and Republicans are nearly identical. Republicans, who have traditionally favored tough on crime tactics to battle drug crises are suddenly shifting their tone to a softer treatment approach. The attitudes of Democrats are often indistinguishable, which has led to many bipartisan efforts including the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA). A recent *New York Times* article reported on Democrats' and Republicans' coalescence around very similar narratives with regard to the opioid crisis during the 2018 midterm elections, According the author:

The scenes in the political ads play out in almost the same order: A heartbreaking story about someone who can't seem to stop taking drugs. A grim statistic about opioids. And then a somber pitch from a candidate promising solutions.

More and more, politicians in competitive races are using emotional pleas about opioid abuse to woo voters. In states like Wisconsin, where hundreds of people are dying of opioid overdoses every year, candidates are talking about drugs in stump speeches, on Facebook and in ads.

The opioid fight has become a shared talking point for Democrats and Republicans, who discuss the crisis using startlingly similar language and often vote together to pass bills. (Smith, 2018, Jun 7, para. 1-3).

Similar patterns of discourse can be seen New Hampshire. In 2016, then New Jersey Governor, and presidential hopeful, Chris Christie released an advertisement in New Hampshire declaring, "We need to be pro-life for the 16-year-old drug addict who's laying on the floor of the county jail" (Fisher and Zezima, 2015, Oct 3). Local New Hampshire politicians also campaigned on promises to address the state's opioid crisis. Both Democrats and Republicans released ads touting their plans to defeat addiction, many times featuring nearly identical narratives.

The opioid crisis was a central theme of campaign ads in the hotly contested senate race between incumbent Republican, Kelly Ayotte and Democrat Maggie Hassan. Both candidates released campaign ads trumpeting their efforts to address the state's opioid crisis while attacking their opponents record—ads which aired hundreds of times on WMUR during the campaign season. Hassan released an ad touting her proposals for "Targeting millions to fight the opioid crisis...all with no income or sales tax." (McElveen, 2016, Aug 5). In an effort to undermine Hassan's record, special interest groups even attempted to the control the narrative on the issue, with the National Republican Senatorial Committee releasing an attack ad accusing Maggie Hassan of mishandling the opioid crisis. The ad

features Melissa Crews, board member of the non-profit, HOPE for New Hampshire Recovery, claiming that “the cost of entrenchment and bureaucracy is 429 people dying a year,” effectively laying blame on Hassan for the state’s high overdose mortality rate. The ad faced considerable pushback from Hassan’s campaign and public health professionals, and under mounting criticism Melissa Crews was forced to resign from the board of HOPE for New Hampshire Recovery. The conservative super PAC, One Nation, linked to Republican strategist Karl Rove, also released a series of ads attacking Maggie Hassan’s record on the opioid crisis, while touting her contender, Kelly Ayotte’s successes. In one ad, a narrator claims that “Maggie Hassan’s budget veto last year forced delays for substance abuse programs, program delays that threatened families in need,” while images flash of a man on life support being rushed into a hospital on a stretcher. In another ad, a narrator declares that, “Senator Ayotte is fighting back with bipartisan solutions. Ayotte’s bill invests in prevention, treatment, recovery, and law enforcement,” while images flash of support groups, laughing families, and police officers (Ronayne, K., 2016, Aug 25). Ayotte also released her own emotional one-minute ad titled, “Helping NH Families Deal With Opioid Addiction.” The ad features Pam and Doug Griffin of Newton, New Hampshire, who gained national attention after travelling to the White House to share the story of their 20-year old daughter, Courtney’s fatal heroin overdose (DiStaso, 2016, Sep 20) (also see chapter IV). The following is a transcript from Ayotte’s campaign ad:

Pam Griffin: Our daughter Courtney got caught in a web of opiate and heroin addiction.  
Doug Griffin: our insurance company indicated that Courtney's problem wasn't a matter of life and death –

Pam Griffin: she told me that she didn't want to live like this anymore... she begged... she begged for help, saying mom - please help me.

Doug Griffin: our family's tragedy could happen to any family...

Pam Griffin: we knew we had to save other families from losing their children. Kelly reached out to us.

Doug Griffin: she came to my family to learn more.

Pam Griffin: she listened to what we had to say, who we were - she cared about us... she didn't know us.

Doug Griffin: Kelly co-authored the comprehensive addiction and recovery act - this act will save kids' lives... ...and enable families to get the help they need.

Doug Griffin: we don't want Courtney to be remembered for her substance abuse, but rather for her struggle to achieve recovery.

Pam Griffin: Kelly believes recovery is possible.

(Kelly Ayotte for New Hampshire, 2016, sep 20).

The Griffins' emotional story about addiction and recovery advocacy is characteristically sympathetic—emblematic of the increasingly compassionate tone towards addicts and addiction. With suburban white families losing children to addiction at rates unseen before, vocal and politically connected parents have the sympathetic ears of policymakers—a channel for political voice and representation not accessible to those impacted by previous epidemics. That the Griffins were invited to the White House to speak with the drug czar, referenced in a campaign speech by Donald Trump, featured in local and national news stories, and in political ads of prominent politicians, highlights the discursive value of their story (Mackin, 2016, Sep 20). Their story was featured in regional news publication such the North Andover Massachusetts based *Eagle Tribune*, and the *Concord Monitor* based in Concord, New Hampshire. The Griffins, were even featured prominently in an Oct. 30, 2015 *New York Times* article entitled, “*In Heroin Crisis, White Families Seek Gentler War on Drugs.*” The article quotes Doug Griffin extensively, who credits parents like themselves for the political mobilization around the opioid issue. “They’re paying more attention because people are screaming about it,” Griffin is quoted as saying. He continues, “I work with 100 people every day — parents, people in recovery, addicts — who are invading the statehouse, doing everything we can to make as much noise as we can to try to save these kids” (Seelye, 2015, Oct 30). And it seems that these actions have gotten sympathetic ears from news media and politicians alike. As the article notes:

The old industrial cities, quiet small towns and rural outposts are seeing a near-daily parade of drug summit meetings, task forces, vigils against heroin, pronouncements from lawmakers and news media reports on the heroin crisis (Seelye, 2015, Oct 30, para. 21)

Doug Griffin's public declarations and grievances were so influential, they even shaped the course of state level policy outcomes. As the *New York Times* article notes:

Among recent bills passed by the New Hampshire legislature in response is one that gives friends and family access to naloxone, the anti-overdose medication. Mr. Griffin, a few months after his daughter died, was among those testifying for the bill. It was set to pass in May but would not take effect until January 2016 — until Mr. Griffin warned lawmakers that too many lives could be lost in that six-month gap. At his urging, the bill was amended to take effect as soon as it was signed into law. It went into effect June 2. (Seelye, 2015, Oct 30, para 34)

Citizens of New Hampshire even helped to elevate the issue to the national stage during the 2016 presidential primaries. As the first presidential primary in the nation, New Hampshire residents urged candidates to take notice of the toll the crisis has taken on the state. Hillary Clinton paid attention; while vying for Democratic nomination in New Hampshire she unveiled a \$10 billion-dollar plan to fight the epidemic (Seelye, 2015, Oct 30). As the article points out:

Since New Hampshire holds the first-in-the-nation presidential primary, residents have repeatedly raised the issue of heroin with the 2016 candidates.

Mrs. Clinton still recalls her surprise that the first question she was asked in April, at her first open meeting in New Hampshire as a candidate, was not about the economy or health care, but heroin. Last month, she laid out a \$10 billion plan to combat and treat drug addiction over the next decade (Seelye, 2015, Oct 30 para. 24-25)

Not only have empowered and resource-rich parents earned the attention of lawmakers, they have also led the effort to soften the traditionally tough stance law enforcement has taken when it comes to drugs. Eric Adams, a former undercover narcotics officer in Laconia, New Hampshire admits that he now sees addicts as “people” with a “purpose in life.”

“the way I look at addiction now is completely different,” Mr. Adams said. “I can’t tell you what changed inside of me, but these are people and they have a purpose in life, and we can’t as law enforcement look at them any other way. They are committing crimes to feed their addiction, plain and simple. They need help.”

Often working with the police, rather than against them, parents are driving these kinds of individual conversions (Seelye, 2015, Oct 30 para. 39-40)

The Griffins story is just one example of parents shaping the conversations around addiction. These stories are common in New Hampshire, and frequently have been folded into politicians’ campaign strategies. It was a prominent theme in both Republican Kelly Ayotte’s and Maggie Hassan’s 2016 bid for New Hampshire’s senate seat. The hotly contested 2016 senate race was taken by a thin margin by Hassan, beating the incumbent Republican contender by only .2 percentage points (Seelye, 2016, Nov, 9)..

In New Hampshire’s 2<sup>nd</sup> congressional district, incumbent democratic representative Annie Kuster, also ran a close campaign against Republican challenger, Jim Lawrence. Kuster earned 49.7 percent of the vote to Lawrence’s 45.3 percent (New Hampshire U.S. House 2nd District Results: Ann McLane Kuster Wins, 2017, Aug 1). Kuster,chose to make the opioid epidemic a central focus of her campaign, running an emotional ad with a New Hampshire mother chronicling her son’s fatal heroin overdose. The ad ran continuously on WMUR in the weeks prior to the 2016 election. The following is an excerpts from the ad:

When I first found out that Carl had been using heroin I immediately thought “not my son.” I found him in his bathroom with a syringe still in his hand and that was the worst day of my life. Annie Kuster is leading the fight regarding this opioid epidemic. She's trying to do everything she can to get laws changed, so this doesn't happen again. She's definitely a leader. I just love Annie. (Ann Kuster for Congress, 2018).

The opioid epidemic was also addressed frequently in the 2016 New Hampshire Gubernatorial race that pitted incumbent Republican, Chris Sununu against Democratic



challenger, Colin Van Ostern. Chris Sununu, a moderate Libertarian Conservative, released series of campaign ads before the 2016 election, declaring that, “The opioid and heroin crisis in New Hampshire knows no boundaries and is affecting all of us...our businesses, families, our loved ones, our coworkers in every town” and, “We will lead by investing in job training and substance abuse recovery programs to ensure our state’s quality of life is second to none” (Chris Sununu, 2016, May 19). Soon after taking office Sununu echoed Trump’s claims that the majority of the fentanyl found in New Hampshire is funneled through the sanctuary city of Lawrence, Massachusetts. In a March address in at St. Anselm College in Goffstown, New Hampshire Sununu remarked:

Eighty-five percent of fentanyl in this state is coming straight out of Lawrence Massachusetts. Guess what? We are going in. We are going to get tough on these guys, and I want to scare every dealer that wants to come across that border. (Walcott, 2017 Mar 1).

Sununu’s threat to send New Hampshire law enforcement agents across the Massachusetts border to target drug-dealers in Lawrence was unprecedented. In an interview with the Boston Herald, on the same day, Sununu buckled down on his threats. He had this to say:

They have undocumented drug dealers that are dealing these drugs, they are getting arrested, they are being given bail by judges – I can’t understand how they are getting bail by the way with the judges in Massachusetts (Walcott, 2017, Mar 1).

Sununu’s comments, however, did not go over well with New Hampshire’s southern neighbor. Lawrence, Massachusetts Mayor, Daniel Rivera, who also was a vocal challenger of Trump’s unverified claim that Lawrence is of, “one of the primary sources of fentanyl” offered a strong reproach (Nilson, 2017, Mar 2). Criticizing Sununu’s assertions, Rivera rebuked,

These borders have been here forever, when we were colonies, but the drugs don’t identify those borders, the users don’t identify those borders (Nilson, 2017, Mar 2).

In many ways the cross-border dispute between Lawrence Mayor, Daniel Rivera and New Hampshire Governor, Chris Sununu is a microcosm of Trump's international feud with Mexican officials over drugs and immigration. Like the U.S. and Mexico, the contiguous territories of Lawrence, Mass, and New Hampshire symbolize starkly different cultural and political realities. New Hampshire is overwhelmingly white with 93.6% identifying as non-Hispanic white, and only 3.7% of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino. according to the latest census data (QuickFacts New Hampshire, 2018). Lawrence, Massachusetts, directly south of the New Hampshire border, on the other hand had a racial make-up of 15.5% non-Hispanic white, and 75.1% Hispanic or Latino (QuickFacts Lawrence city, Massachusetts, 2018). As home to a large immigrant community, and with its "sanctuary city" designation, and the label as a gateway for fentanyl to New Hampshire, Lawrence occupies the same mythical space as Mexico.

This chapter attempts to evaluate the news representations of the opioid crisis in this geopolitical and socio-cultural context. WMUR, as New Hampshire's premiere destination for TV news, serves an important function in how communities are informed and educated about the opioid crisis in the regional context of the Merrimack Valley. The thematic patterns in WMUR's coverage of the opioid crisis are therefore worthy of critical interrogation.

## **2. Framing the Crisis**

The purpose of this section is to introduce a working definition of framing and to survey the various methodological approaches to analyzing frames. The task of finding a singular definition of framing is difficult as there are many competing descriptions—as Boydston et al (2013) proclaim the, "very definition of framing has been notoriously slippery." The concept of framing, nevertheless, is almost always traced back to Erving Goffman's seminal text

*Frame Analysis* (1974). In this book, Goffman (1974) defines framing broadly as, “the principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them” (p. 10). Framing from this perspective involves the processing and organization of events into pre-established structures of consciousness—or what Goffman (1974) calls the “schemata of interpretation.” In other words, when presented with information and every day occurrences, individuals rely on labels, schema, and stereotypes to understand and respond to them. Though Goffman (1974) mostly focused on unmediated exchanges from a sociological perspective, he did recognize how journalists use frames to “organize strips of the everyday world, a strip being an arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of on- going activity” (p. 10-11). Other influential critical media scholars including Entman (1993), Hall (1980), McQuail (1994) built on Goffman’s definition to develop new theoretical understandings of the ways in which news discourse is packaged and framed to construct a particular social reality for audiences. For example, Entman (1993) describes framing as the process of selecting, “...some aspects of a perceived reality...” to “...make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). Apart from advancing conceptual definitions of framing, scholars have generated multiple methodological approaches for analyzing and understanding media frames. Most approaches however, are based in the same two processes; *frame discovery* and *frame analysis* (Boydston et al, 2013)

The first process, *frame discovery*, is when a, “political scientist or communications scholar identifies the catalogue of frames in a political discourse about a particular issue” (Boydston et al, 2013, p. 1). When using framing as a methodological strategy, researchers

must identify the most commonly used framing devices and provide operationalized definitions for the selected news frames. These operationalized definitions are usually either expressed as issue specific frames or generic frames (Linström and Marais, 2012). Issue specific frames refer to the ideological and schematic structures commonly applied by Journalists when presenting information about a particular event or subject. For example, issues specific frames in the news coverage of the war on drugs may include “the law and order frame,” “the public health frame,” and “the pro-legalization frame.” More narrowly, the “law and order frame” could be used to describe the normative patterns in the media’s coverage of the crack epidemic of the 1980’s and 90’s. Generic frames, on the other hand are encodings or representational patterns that are favored amongst journalists often to conform to lexical, narrative, ideological, and structural constraints. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), for example, developed generic frames to account for dramatic and linguistic conventions in storytelling, including metaphors, stories (myths, legends), traditions (rituals, ceremonies), slogan, jargon, catchphrases, artifacts, contrast, and spin. Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) identify five commonly used narrative frames utilized by the media. They include human impact; powerlessness; economics; moral values; and conflict. Similarly, Pan and Kosicki (1993) demonstrate how news stories are often framed by signifying elements, including syntactical structures, thematic structures, rhetorical structures, and script structures. Meanwhile, Boydston et al (2013) have developed a Policy Frames Codebook, which identifies fourteen frames commonly applied in news stories, and a 15<sup>th</sup> “other” category to account for frames not included in the typology. This codebook can be applied to both issue specific and generic frames. It includes the following framing categories:

1. Economic frames

2. Capacity and resources frames
  3. Morality frames
  4. Fairness and equality frames
  5. Constitutionality and jurisprudence frames
  6. Policy prescription and evaluation
  7. Law and order, crime and justice frames.
  8. Security and defense frames
  9. Health and safety frames.
  10. Quality of life frames
  11. Cultural identity frames
  12. Public opinion frames.
  13. Political frames.
  14. External regulation and reputation frames
  15. Other frames.
- (Boydston et al, 2013 p. 4-5)

These frames account for common representational strategies for incorporating knowledge and experiences into an existing sign system circumscribed by lexical, ideological, economic and discursive structures. The encoding of a message within representational parameters of a sign system, can create a narrow “window” through which the world is seen, which can then limit the array of potential decodings by audiences (Hall, 1980). It is therefore important to identify prevalent signs in news discourse and their significant potential. The different ways audiences respond to and decode messages depending on cultural background, economic status, and personal experience, however must be accounted for. The encoding and decoding process permits a multiplicity of significations arising from diverse readings of a single sign (Hall, 1980) such that there is, “no one-to-one correspondence between signifying elements and meaning...” (Pan and Kosicki, 1993, p. 59).

The second phase of inquiry typically involves a *frame analysis*, which entails, “coding instances of framing in text... in order to reveal patterns in frame usage” (Boydston et al, 2013 p. 1). Frame analysis can be both quantitative and qualitative (Linström and Marais,

2012). In quantitative framing analysis headlines, news stories are typically coded (often by multiple coders) and catalogued according to the typologies developed in the discovery phase. Once the data has been tabulated, the researcher can calculate intercoder reliability to determine how consistently the data was processed between coders. The research can also determine how frequently frames were used to cover a specific issue, across a specific platform and timeframe. The numeric values generated through quantitative analysis, however often do not allow for rich heuristic understanding of framing effects, and therefore a deeper analytical and interpretive evaluations of data is required. Qualitative analysis goes beyond classifying textual data into framing typologies—often involving interpretive analyses of *rhetorical devices* in textual data such as word choice, metaphors, exemplars, and the presence or absence of key words and stock phrases (Entman, 1993; Linström and Marais, 2012). Analysis of these rhetorical devices can lead the researcher to, “” thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgement” (Entman 1993, p. 52). Qualitative inquiry into framing effects can also involve analysis of *technical devices*, which are defined as “various elements of news-writing” and “technical elements such as layout and visuals” (Linström and Marais, 2012, p. 32). Technical devices can include; headlines, photographs, photo captions, leads, source selection, quote selection (Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Linström and Marais, 2012).

Qualitative and quantitative approaches to frame analysis are not mutually exclusive, and in fact can be used effectively as complimentary methods. Van Gorp (2007) suggests, “using quantitative techniques to examine overall trends in large data sets, and qualitative techniques to examine subtle framing effects in smaller data sets” (Linström and Marais, 2012, p. 27).

## **B. Methodology**

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to frame analysis that employs both quantitative and qualitative forms of inquiry. The operational definitions of framing devices utilize the Policy Frames Codebook developed by Boydston et al (2013) to identify the generic and issue specific framing devices employed in WMUR's coverage of New Hampshire's opioid crisis. As Boydston et al (2013) detail, the Policy Frames Codebook allows the researchers to apply frames broadly across a range of general or issue-specific policy issues in any communication context.

Our Policy Frames Codebook is intended to provide the best of both worlds: a general system for categorizing frames across policy issues designed so that it can also be specialized in issue-specific ways. The codebook contains 14 categories of frame "dimensions" (plus an "other" category) that are intended to be applicable to any policy issue (abortion, immigration, foreign aid, etc.) and in any communication context (news stories, Twitter, party manifestos, legislative debates, etc.).

Frame analysis is most commonly used to catalogue and evaluate codable and discreet bodies of text available in print or digital repositories, such as newspaper, website, social media archives. Few studies, however employ coding techniques to perform a frame analysis of television news discourse due to the difficulty of processing and cataloguing speech on live television. Previously closed caption archives of television programs were not available to the public, but recently the non-profit group, the *Internet Archive*, has undertaken a large-scale endeavor to give researchers, scholars, and the general public free access to thousands of hours of archived news footage, including searchable closed captions ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)). The endeavor began after September 11<sup>th</sup>, as an effort to build a catalogable online repository of news stories about the attacks. As the non-profit explains on the "about us" page of its website:

Like the Internet, television is also an ephemeral medium. We began archiving television programs in late 2000, and our first public TV project was an archive of TV news surrounding the events of September 11, 2001. In 2009 we began to make selected U.S. television news broadcasts searchable by captions in our TV News Archive. This service allows researchers and the public to use television as a citable and sharable reference. (About the Internet Archive, n.d.)

Since 2009, the TV News Archive has logged clips from 1,808,000 shows. The website maintains searchable database of closed captions from hundreds of programs and creators (About the Internet Archive, n.d.). A simple search of the term “opioid” returned results for 36,927 programs in the 10-year period between 2009 and 2019. FOXNEWS topped nationally broadcast cable news programs with 2,526 programs for the term “opioid,” followed by CNN (1,865), and MSNBC (1,612). Among locally syndicated programming, WCAU/NBC affiliate in Philadelphia market topped results with 1,601, followed by WPVI/ABC affiliate in Philadelphia market (1,290), KYW/CBS affiliate in Philadelphia market (1,030), KPIX/CBS affiliate in San Francisco Market (987), WRC/NBC affiliate in Washington D.C. market (928), KGO/ABC affiliate in Bay Area and San Francisco market (802), KNTV/NBC affiliate in San Francisco market (764), WTXF/FOX affiliate in Philadelphia market (760) and WMUR/ABC affiliate in Manchester, NH and Boston market (679). Noteworthy here, is that the right-wing news network, FOXNEWS had significantly more programs with mentions of “opioids” than CNN or MSNBC—outlets often characterized as left of center. The Philadelphia and San Francisco area TV markets also has significantly more mentions than other regional markets. Although the reasons behind these numbers not clear, these patterns are worth mentioning. WMUR with 679 programs was 9<sup>th</sup> among all local network affiliates.

The initial sample of 679 programs was limited by only focusing on locally-produced news to eliminate syndicated content from nationally broadcast programs, like 60 minutes.



Nationally syndicated programming hosted on WMUR and political and commercial advertisements were not included in the analysis, as to limit the dataset to local news stories covering the Southern New Hampshire/Northeastern Massachusetts market. Further limiting the sample only programs airing during the three-month period between September 1 and November 30, 2016 were selected. This time period is significant as it covers the final months leading up to the 2016 election, as well as its immediate aftermath. Locally produced stories on the opioid epidemic were aired on 59 days in the three-month span that the present study (covering more than 60 percent of days in this timeframe). In total there were 132 stories about the opioid epidemic in the three-month time period that were selected for analysis. Some stories were repeated at different points of the news cycle, but still included in the analysis to account for the variability in coverage between stories. Once the programs were selected closed captioning from news segments focusing on the opioid issue were imported into separate documents and catalogued according to date. All closed captions of local WMUR programming are available to the public on the website, [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

Once the closed captions were collated and catalogued, the files were imported into the NVivo qualitative coding software. Next top-level nodes were created according to the frame classification in the Policy Frames Codebook. (Economic frames, capacity and resources frames, morality frames, fairness and equality frames, constitutionality and jurisprudence frames, policy prescription and evaluation, law and order, crime and justice frames, security and defense frames and safety frames, quality of life frames, cultural identity frames, public opinion frames, political frames, external regulation and reputation frames, and other frames). Boydston (2016) identifies second layer frames that account for implicit and explicit bias and tone in the news story from extreme support of an issue to extreme denunciation.

These framing structures are broken up into a five-point binary scale that includes the items, “explicit pro” “implicit pro,” “neutral,” “implicit anti,” and “explicit anti.” These five were included as “child” nodes under each top-level policy frame node, to allow for each news segment to be classified according to tone. The news segments were then coded into top level nodes and child nodes. Some news segments fit into multiple policy frames, and therefore were coded into more than one node. GDELT Television explorer software was also utilized to map and compare trends in WMUR’s news coverage during the timeframe included in this study. GDELT mines data from the Internet Archive’s database to generate visualization that summarizes the total volume (in terms of percentage of total monitored airtime) of broadcast news dedicated to covering a specific issue. The software is able to detect single mentions of keywords in 15 second intervals. Every time a given keyword appears in a 15 second interval it is logged and represented on a “visual timeline” that displays the 15 second intervals as a proportion of total monitored airtime. According to the GDELT website the visual timeline, “shows the percent of all news programming airtime on each selected station monitored by the Internet Archive over the selected time period that matched your search. It offers a quick visual gauge of how much news attention your search is receiving on each selected station” ([api.qdeltproject.com](http://api.qdeltproject.com)). To determine the percentage of broadcast time on WMUR devoted to the opioid issue, a query was run using the keyword “opioid.” The results were limited to the three-month timeframe between September 1<sup>st</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to maintain temporal consistency with the primary sample. The proportion of airtime devoted to the opioid issue were then compared to other local broadcast networks as well as national cable news networks.

### C. Results

To start, a simple word frequency query was run on NVivo to determine which terms were most often uttered during the live telecasts included in the sample. The word most frequently appearing in the corpus of the text comprised of all closed captions was “drug” at 230 times, followed by “opioid” (185), “crisis” (162), “state” (162), “people” (145), “addiction” (124), “reporter” (107), “year” (104), “recovery” (95), “treatment” (90), “heroin” (86), “overdose” (82), and “police” (81).

Next, the charts and visualization produced by the GDELT software were analyzed. The visualizations and charts provide data on amount of coverage devoted to the opioid issue on WMUR news programs, measured as a proportion of total broadcast airtime. The results were then compared to data from the three major national cable news networks (CNN, FOXNEWS, and MSNBC), as well other local broadcast networks. The ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliate networks in Philadelphia, PA, and the CBS and NBC affiliate networks in Boston (WMUR is an ABC affiliate broadcasting from Manchester, NH). Philadelphia, PA was chosen as a comparison because it’s has a similar audience reach as the Boston/Manchester, NH market. The Philadelphia TV market is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in the nation reaching 2,816,850 households, while the Boston/Manchester Market is ranked 9<sup>th</sup>, reaching 2,364,870 households (Local Television Market Universe Estimates, 2019). It is also the only other market in the top 10, as determined by Nielson ratings to broadcast to a battleground state. The NBC, ABC and CBS affiliates in the Philadelphia market ranked first, second and third respectively in terms of number of programs with at least one mention of the term “opioid” between 2009 and 2019, for a total of 3,921 programs. In comparison WMUR had 679 programs with at least one mention of “opioid” during the same time period. Despite

having far less mentions than any other affiliate in the Philadelphia market during the ten-year period between 2009 and 2019, data collected indicates a remarkable trend during the months leading up to the 2016 election. Figure 10 shows that WMUR devoted significantly more airtime to the opioid issue than Philadelphia network affiliates and other Boston affiliates, as a proportion of overall volume of airtime. Between September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 and November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 0.281 percent of airtime on WMUR was classified as opioid-related compared to 0.107 percent on WPVI (ABC Philadelphia), 0.0989 percent on KYW (CBS Philadelphia), 0.1206 percent on WCAU (NBC Philadelphia), 0.0413 percent on WBZ (CBS Boston), 0.0439 percent on WHDH (NBC Boston). Figure 11 shows comparative coverage volume over time (between September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 and November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016). The chart displays an interesting trend—opioid related coverage on WMUR peaked in mid-September at more than 1.2 percent of overall airtime volume, tapering off around mid-October with a smaller peak on November 6<sup>th</sup>. It should be noted that all networks except CBS Boston and NBC Boston displayed similar peaks around November 6<sup>th</sup>, (election day). ABC Philadelphia peaked around 0.75 percent, NBC Philadelphia peaked around 0.6 percent, and CBS Philadelphia peaked at around 0.55 percent. Figure 12 shows opioid related coverage volume as a comparison between WMUR, and the three major cable news networks (CNN, FOXNEWS, and MSNBC). The graph reveals a significant difference between WMUR and the three major cable news networks in terms of the proportion of overall airtime devoted to opioid-related coverage. While 0.281 percent of airtime on WMUR was classified as opioid-related, the same was true for only 0.0024 percent of CNN, 0.0107 percent for FOXNEWS, and 0.0121 percent for MSNBC. Figure 13 shows WMUR's coverage volume over time

compared to the three major cable networks (between September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 and November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

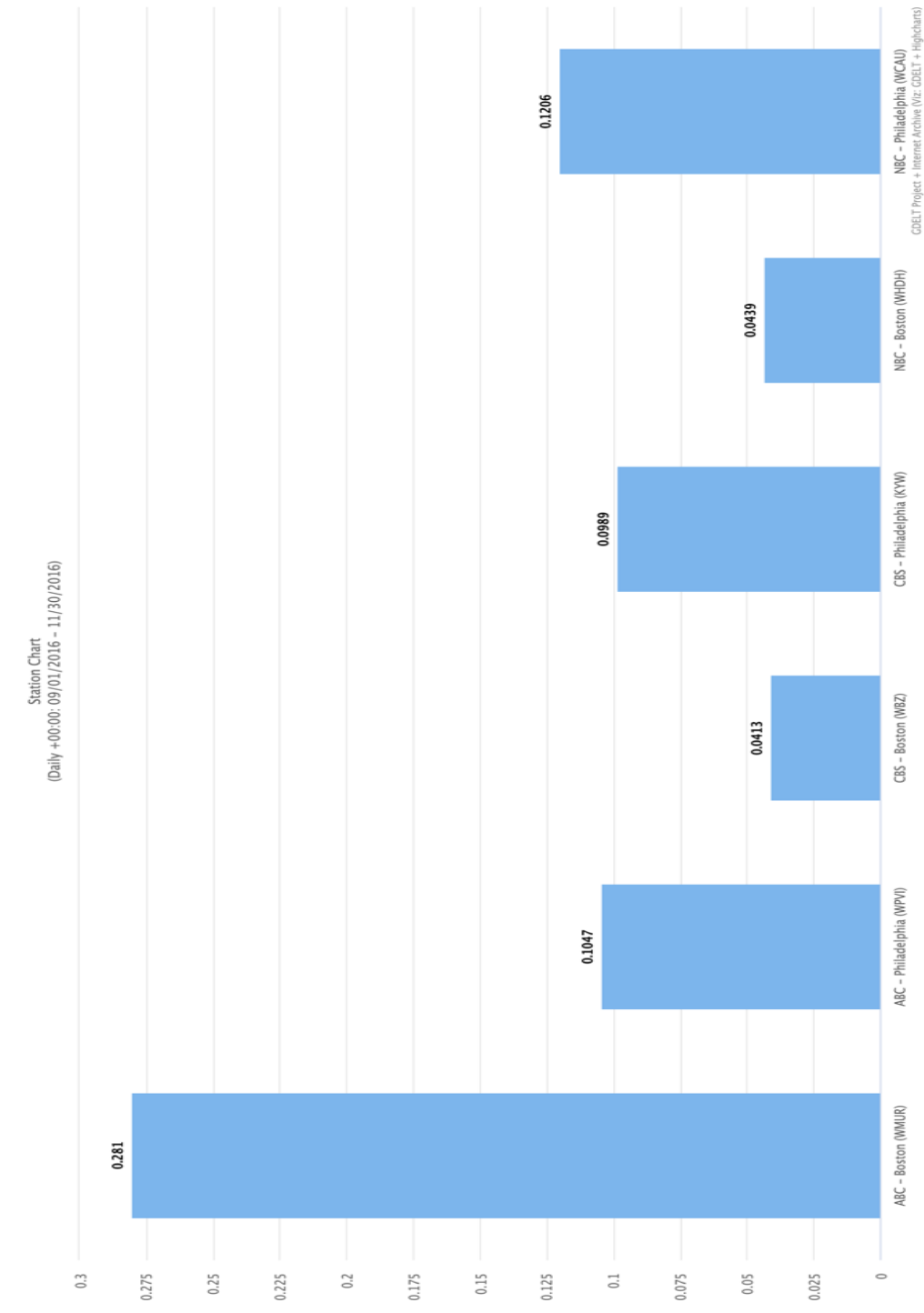


Figure 10: Comparison of opioid related coverage volume between WPVI, KYW, WCAU, WBZ, WHDH, and WMUR (as percentage of total airtime)

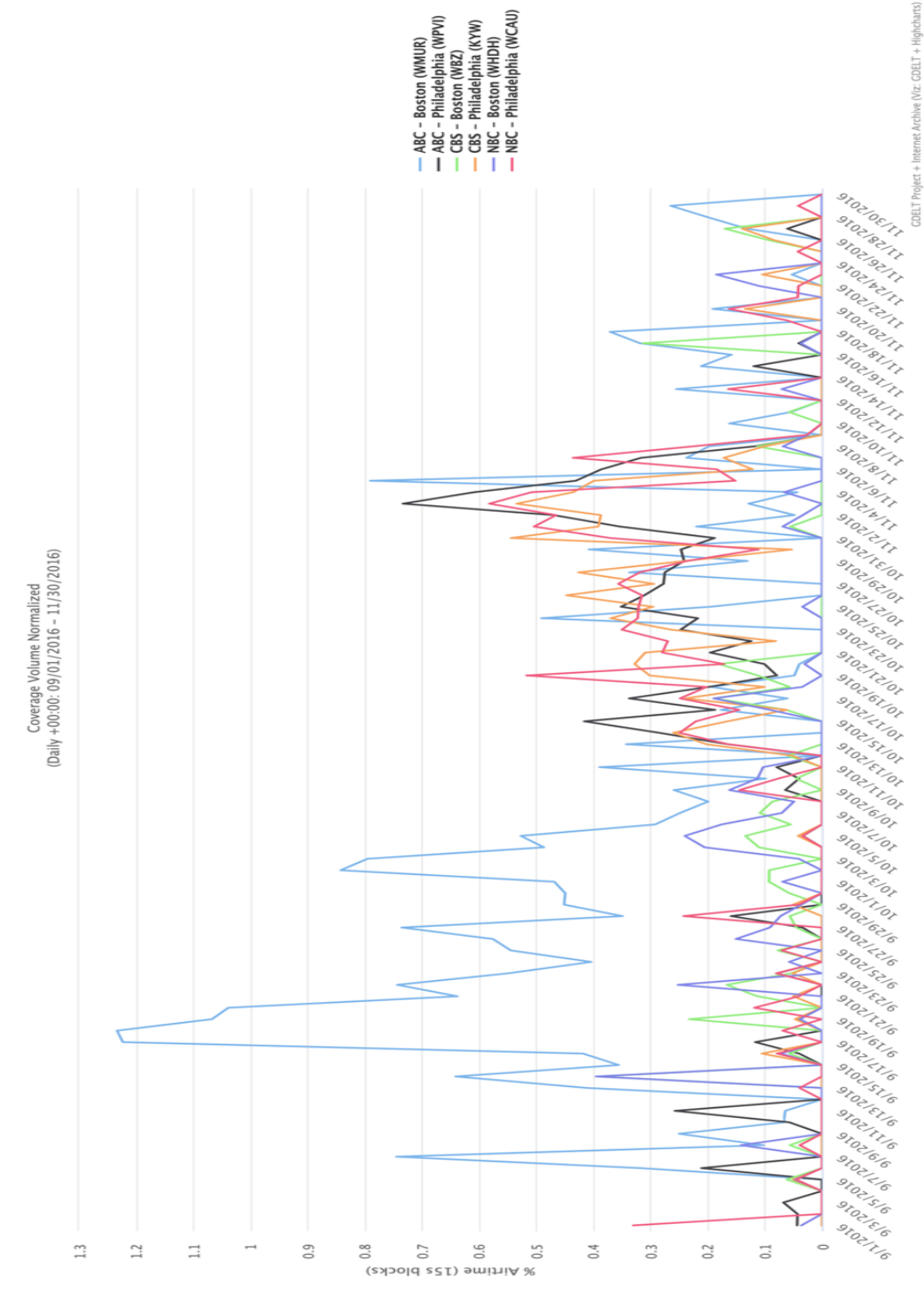


Figure 11: Coverage volume over time between 9/1/2016 and 11/30/2016 (WPVI-Black, KYW-Orange, WCAU-Red, WBZ-Green, WHDH-Purple, and WMUR-Blue)

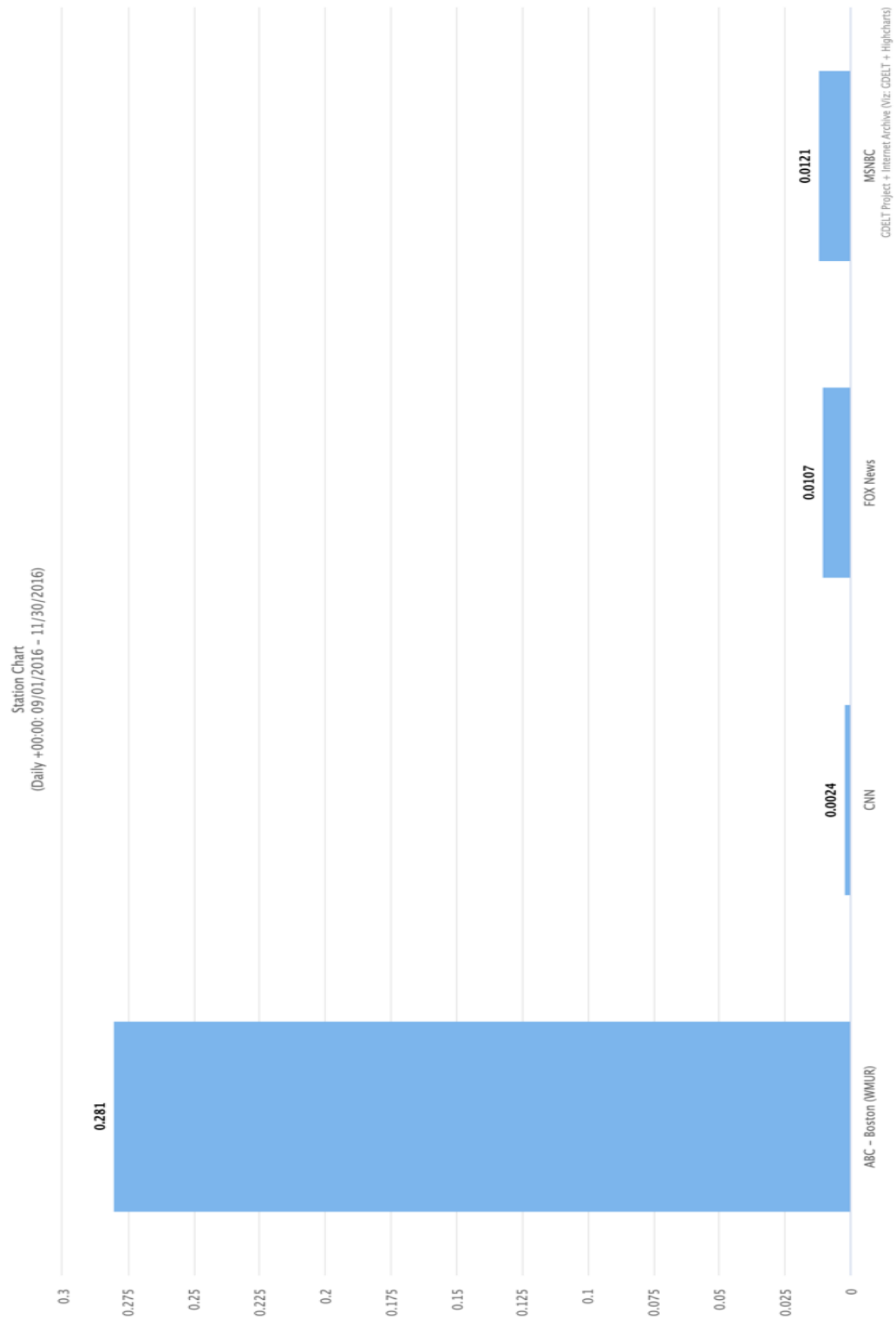


Figure 12: Comparison of opioid related coverage volume between CNN, FOXNEWS, MSNBC, and WMUR (as percentage of total airtime)

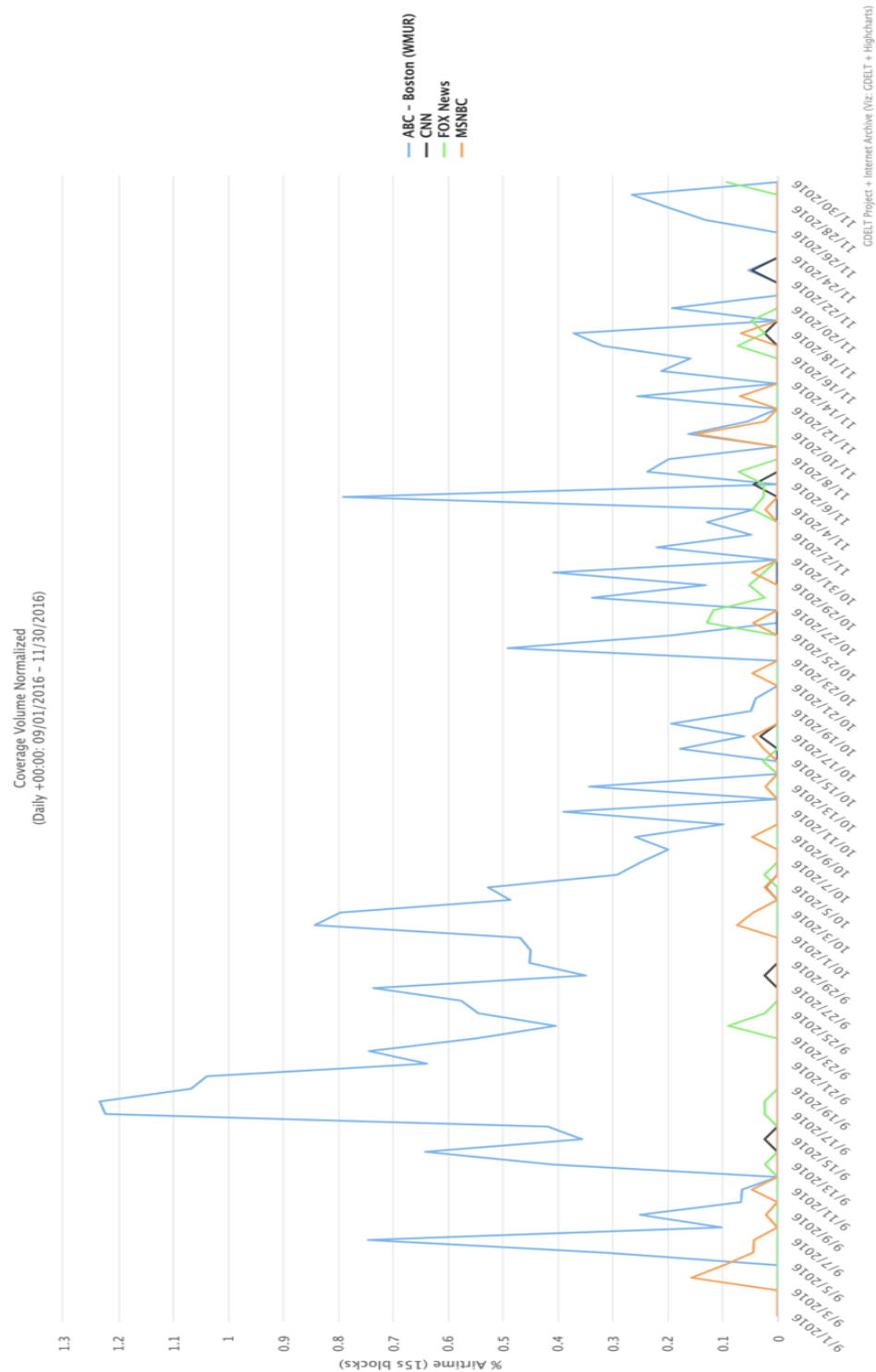


Figure 13: Coverage volume over time between 9/1/2016 and 11/30/2016 (WPVI-Black, KYW-Orange, WCAU-, WBZ, WHDH, and WMUR)



As part of the next phase of analysis, code classifications were catalogued on the NVivo software. After the sample of 132 news stories were coded into the fourteen nodes (plus additional “other” node) outlined in the Policy Frames Codebook (Boydston et al., 2013), rates and frequencies of each code classification were generated. In the final phase, the stories were classified according to framing type, and qualitative analyses were performed to identify prevalent themes, as well as rhetorical and technical devices. The table below is a coding matrix, displaying frequencies of cross-tabulation between framing types. Only with framing types with at least one story were included in the table.

Table 3: Coding matrix of framing devices utilized in opioid related coverage on WMUR (9/1/2016-11/30/2016)

	Capacity and Resource	Economic	External Reg.	Health and Safety	Law and Order	Morality	Policy Pres.	Political	Public Opinion	Qual. of Life	Sec. and Def.
Capacity and Resource	17	1	1	14	3	1	11	8	2	3	2
Economic	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
External Regulation	1	0	8	7	4	2	7	2	0	0	4
Health and Safety	14	1	7	107	35	11	57	14	5	25	7
Law and Order	3	0	4	35	44	4	25	6	1	9	8
Morality	1	0	2	11	4	11	7	0	1	0	0
Policy Prescription	11	0	7	57	25	7	64	15	3	19	8
Political	8	0	2	14	6	0	15	21	1	3	2
Public Opinion	2	0	0	5	1	1	3	1	8	2	0
Quality of Life	3	0	0	25	9	0	19	3	2	25	1
Security and Defense	2	0	4	7	8	0	8	2	0	1	9

In the following section the coding results for the sample of 132 stories are discussed. Each of the fourteen framing devices are analyzed in context of WMUR's coverage of the opioid crisis.

#### **4. Economic Frames**

According to Boydston et al (2013) *Economic Frames*, are framing devices that emphasize, "The costs, benefits, or monetary/financial implications of the issue (to an individual, family, community or to the economy as a whole)" (p. 4). In total there was only one story that was identified as using an *Economic Frame*, representing 0.75 percent of the entire sample. This story was cross-coded once with *Capacity and Resource Frames*, and once with *Health and Safety Frames*. The only story to apply this frame was a WMUR feature on the Gubernatorial debate between Democratic candidate, Colin Van Ostern and Republican challenger, Chris Sununu. The story features a clip of Van Ostern in which he touts his mandated alcohol tax plan that would apply a 5% alcohol tax towards fighting addiction. Ostern also proposed increasing the tobacco tax by \$.10, claiming that "This is not a six-million-dollar problem. It is a \$25 million problem." The assessment of coding frequencies indicates that the *Economic Frame* was not a device commonly employed by newsmakers at WMUR.

#### **5. Capacity and Resources Frames**

According to Boydston et al. (2013) *Capacity and Resources Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, "The lack of or availability of physical, geographical, spatial, human, and financial resources, or the capacity of existing systems and resources to implement or carry out policy goals" (p. 4). In total there were 17 stories that used the *Capacity and Resources*

*Frame* to cover the opioid issue, representing 12.87 percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross coded with *Health and Safety Frames* (fourteen times), followed by *Crime and Justice Frames* (eight times), *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* (eight times), *Political Frames* (three times), *Law and Order, Crime and Justice* (three times), *Quality of Life Frames* (two times), *Public Opinion Frames* (two times), *Security and Defense frames* (one time), *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* (one time), and *Economic Frames* (one time). The majority of the stories in the Capacity and Resource sample (13) focused on funding for treatment and recovery, with fewer mentioning funding for law enforcement (4), prevention (2), and border security (1). This suggests that there is more media attention on allocating resources to public health solutions, rather than criminal justice solutions. Many of the stories featured statements from citizens and public officials decrying the lack of funding for addiction treatment and recovery services. For example, one story featured a statement from a member of Governor's Committee, who explained, "New Hampshire is the 49th state in the country as far as treatment spending and that's where our resources we know need to be allocated to." There was consistent coverage of local and national candidates' positions on the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), the Obama-backed bipartisan legislature, which increased funding for addiction treatment and recovery. Many statements from politicians on the campaign trail reflect the position that CARA does not go far enough. In one segment on the senatorial debates, Senator Shelley Sheehan is recorded urging congress to pass emergency funding to help fight the war on opioids "If congress can spend billions to fight and Ebola outbreak on a distant continent, surely we can allocate \$600 billion to combat a raging epidemic right here at home if we stayed here and worked together to get this done," Sheehan petitions. Another segment

featured interviews with Pam and Doug Griffin who lost their daughter, Courtney to an opioid overdose in 2014 (see chapter IV for more detailed analysis of the Courtney Griffin story). Courtney died after her insurance company denied coverage for treatment, and since her parents have been committed to advocating for better access to addiction recovery and treatment services. As Doug Griffin told WMUR, “we’re doing this because there wasn’t help for our daughter.... congress needs to appropriate more money for treatment. It is the single biggest issue that we hear from parents, from law enforcement officers, from physicians.” Governor elect Chris Sununu was more circumspect in his statements after visiting soon to be Vice President, Mike Pence. Speaking about the Trump/Pence ticket Sununu explained, “they recognize the severity of the opioid crisis in New Hampshire and I am pleased that they understand the urgency. it is about getting services to the officers on the front line, the services to recovery centers the services to the schools for prevention programs.” Debate coverage featured statements from senatorial candidate Jeannie Forrester calling for more resources to protect portions of New Hampshire border, including using the national guard, and from former Republican Representative Guinta, calling for increased funding for the border with Mexico to prevent drugs from coming into New Hampshire communities. Apart from a few “law and order” appeals, the large majority of the ‘capacity and resource’ stories were framed around discussions of public health.

## **6. Morality Frames**

According to Boydston et al. (2013) *Morality Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, “Any perspective—or policy objective or action (including proposed action)—that is compelled by religious doctrine or interpretation, duty, honor, righteousness or any other sense of ethics or social responsibility. (p.4). In total there 11 stories that used Morality

Frames to cover the opioid issue, constituting 8.33 percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Health and Safety Frames* (11 times), *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* (seven times), *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames* (four times), *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* (two times) and *Capacity and Resource Frames* (one time). Several of the stories moral and ethical discussions around the Mandy McGowan case (see chapter IV for more detailed analysis of the Mandy McGowan story). The Lawrence Police Department claimed that ethical intentions were behind its decision to post the video McGowan's overdose on its website. The police officer interviewed as part of the story explained that, "there's value in the fact that people can see firsthand how debilitating and what this addiction causes." He urged viewers to, "think about it from a place of empathy about a person who's struggling with something." The insistence by a police officer that we treat drug users with empathy and compassion presents a clear divergence from the tough on crime rhetoric that has been historically associated with the war on drugs. This moral imperative was also found in the campaign rhetoric of many the candidates vying for votes in New Hampshire. Colin Van Ostern, democratic hopeful for Governor, for example, appealed to 'ethical' solutions to the opioid crisis, including, "attacking the problem, not the people with the problem." Another program featured an interview with Ivanka Trump, as she stumped for her father in New Hampshire. Ivanka Trump told WMUR, "for my father, coming to New Hampshire and speaking to so many parents who have lost children or sisters who have lost siblings or brothers, it has changed his life." Trump, who often references the loss of his brother to addiction, is motivated by what appears to be a righteous calling to end the opioid scourge. This is expressed in the President's official stance on the opioid crisis, posted on the Whitehouse website: "For

President Trump, ending the opioid epidemic is more than just a policy issue. It's a calling driven from his firsthand family experience" (Ending America's Opioid Crisis, n.d.). These statements parallel many widely circulated first-hand accounts from parents and siblings of individuals lost to New Hampshire's opioid crisis. The story of Pam and Doug Griffin's public grief over their daughter's fatal overdose (also see chapter IV) received significant airplay and was often framed around moral and religious themes. One WMUR reporter explained, "they urge people to volunteer in some way and to pray." Doug Griffin followed with this account: "We hosted a church service once a month for addicts and their families. That's becoming a growing trend in our area. A lot of churches are joining in. We get 10 people a month that come. It's needed." All of these accounts suggest that addiction is often framed by the media, politicians and families as a moral issue. The framing of addiction as a moral issue, rather than a criminal issue, is to be expected given the increasingly compassionate tone towards users.

## **7. Fairness and Equality Frames**

According to Boydston et al. (2013) *Fairness and Equality Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, "Equality or inequality with which laws, punishment, rewards, and resources are applied or distributed among individuals or groups. Also the balance between the rights or interests of one individual or group compared to another individual or group" (p.4). There were zero stories that used the *Fairness and Equality frame*. The absence of this framing device may suggest that newsmakers avoided taking a critical stance on issues of fairness and equality, including those in which drug laws are applied disproportionately across gender, race and class.

## 8. Constitutionality and Jurisprudence Frames

According to Boydston et al. (2013) *Constitutionality and Jurisprudence Frames* are framing devices that emphasize,

The constraints imposed on or freedoms granted to individuals, government, and corporations via the Constitution, Bill of Rights and other amendments, or judicial interpretation. This deals specifically with the authority of government to regulate, and the authority of individuals/corporations to act independently of government” (p.4).

There were no were no instances in which stories fit into the *Constitutionality and Jurisprudence Frame*. Although New Hampshire maintains a strong independent spirit extolled by libertarian values, the opioid issue was not examined through this frame. On the contrary, many stories stressed the need for greater government oversight and involvement.

## 9. Policy Prescription and Evaluation

Although New Hampshire’s opioid crisis was not framed as a constitutional issue, there were many discussions around drug policy. According to Boydston et al. (2013) *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, “Particular policies proposed for addressing an identified problem, and figuring out if certain policies will work, or if existing policies are effective” (p.4). In total there were 64 stories that fit into the *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frame*, constituting 48.48 percent of the entire sample. These stories were cross-coded most frequently with *Health and Safety Frames* (57 times), followed by *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames* (25 times), *Quality of Life Frames* (19 times), *Political Frames* (15 times), *Capacity and Resource Frames* (11 times), *Security and Defense Frames* (eight times), *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* (seven times), *Morality Frames* (seven times), and *Political Frames* (three times). In WMUR’s coverage, several policies were addressed as part of the Granite State’s attempts to curb the

devastating effects of the opioid crisis. The coverage was dedicated primarily to policies to improve access to treatment, bolster prevention efforts, add to law enforcement resources, implement more stringent opioid prescription guidelines, and to interdict contraband along both the Mexico and the Massachusetts border. There was also extensive coverage of the Comprehensive Addiction Recovery Act, authored by a bipartisan committee and signed into law by Obama. On the opioid issue, there was rare agreement between Republicans and Democrats, with both sides advocating for mostly non-punitive approaches to combatting addiction. One example of this is the Bipartisan Opioids and Heroin Task Force, co-chaired by Democratic Congresswoman, Anne Kuster of New Hampshire, and Republican Congressman Tom MacArthur of New Jersey. The coverage of the task force was largely positive, featuring statements from lawmakers such as Anne Kuster, who appeared in one segment, explaining, “Look, we've got work to do that's not partisan. Heroin and equal pay and paid family leave, these are not partisan issues, these are people issues. This is about people's real lives.” In many of the stories real people’s lives were used to illustrate the need for policy interventions. The Griffins’ story of losing a child to addiction, once again was used to highlight the issues, specifically efforts to lobby congress for appropriation of greater treatment funding. One story follows the Griffin’s trip to the White House to meet with the national drug czar. In this segment Doug Griffin tells WMUR “... congress needs to appropriate more money for treatment. It's the single biggest issue that we hear from parents, from law enforcement officers, from physicians that we just don't have enough treatment capacity in the United States.” This story and many others featuring the Griffins show that families are increasingly involved in framing policy issues, and in some cases directly influencing the outcomes of political processes. This was the case when a New Hampshire



bill passed to give families access to the overdose-reversing drug was amended at the urging of Doug Griffin.

Other major stories included announcements of New Hampshire's drug monitoring program, and the announcement of the D.E.A.'s 360-degree strategy in New Hampshire. The strategy encompasses not only targeting drug traffickers and violent gangs, but also what they call "diversion control" which involves "holistic" methods for driving out the drugs that have ripped through many New Hampshire communities. A D.E.A. agent told WMUR that the strategy, "includes engaging the medical community to educate about opioids and prescriptions and such, and probably the most important thing of all is community outreach." A WMUR reporter responded with this analysis: "The D.E.A is. stepping out of the shadows of law enforcement to embrace a holistic approach." This story shows that the D.E.A., which was at frontlines of a brutal crackdown on drug use, during the 80's and 90's, has opted for a softer, more "holistic" war on drugs. There was coverage of several other policy changes that divert users from the criminal justice system, and into treatment, including recurring stories about Manchester, New Hampshire's innovative "Safe Station" program. A WMUR reporter explains, "the program encourages people suffering from addiction to walk into any fire station to get the help they need. the person will be evaluated and then handed over to a 24-7 treatment and recovery center." The "Safe Station" acts as a nexus for connecting addicts to health and recovery resources—all without any contact with the criminal justice system. Collectively, the coverage of New Hampshire's drug policy initiatives the largely frames opioid crisis as a public health, rather than a law and order issue.

## 10. Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames

Law and order frames, however, are used in particular contexts. According to Boydston et al (2013) *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, “Specific policies in practice and their enforcement, incentives, and implications. Includes stories about enforcement and interpretation of laws by individuals and law enforcement, breaking laws, loopholes, fines, sentencing and punishment. Increases or reductions in crime” (p.4). In total, there were 44 stories that fit into the *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frame*, constituting 33.33 percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Health and Safety Frames* (35 times), followed by *Quality of Life Frames* (nine times), *Security and Defense Frames* (eight times), *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* (seven times), *Political Frames* (six times), *Morality Frames* (four times), *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* (four times), *Capacity and Resource Frames* (three times), and *Political Frames* (one time). During the three-month period, the only reporting on the arrest and/or prosecution of alleged drug users was a feature on the much-publicized overdose of Mandy McGowan (unnamed in the report). The segment features footage recorded by onlookers that shows McGowan sprawled out on the floor of a Lawrence Massachusetts Family Dollar Store as her 2-year old daughter hysterically tugs on her unconscious body (see chapter IV for more detailed analysis). McGowan was not charged with possession of narcotics, but did face criminal charges for child endangerment. Reporters described the incident as “disturbing” and “unsettling.” There were four other stories which reported on criminal charges or investigations stemming from opioid poisoning deaths of minors. One such report detailed charges a man facing stemming from the poisoning death of his 19-month old stepson. The story featured an interview with the man’s grandmother, who

told reporters “I believe in my soul and being that he didn't cause this,” but as a WMUR reported explained, “an open package of the opioid fentanyl was found in the room. He faces misdemeanor child endangerment as well as two felonies for drug possession and allegedly hiding a bottle of pills under a child's blanket. His attorney said he was trying to get help for a drug problem.” This report, like the McGowan story details criminal charges, but does not employ the punitive “tough on crime” tone typical of past coverage of the war on drugs. Instead the coverage often features statements from family members, policymakers, and police officers urging compassion for crimes committed because of a “drug problem.”

In total there were nine reports on arrests of suspected opioid distributors and traffickers, some of whom were charged with manslaughter for supplying individuals with drugs that led to a lethal overdose. Significantly, there were no major reports on criminal investigations and prosecutions of the pharmaceutical companies often blamed for stoking the opioid crisis. All of this suggests that the law and order frame was applied sparingly and selectively, and when it was applied it often was accompanied by pleas for compassion.

## **11. Security and Defense Frames**

According to Boydston et al (2013), *Security and Defense Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, “Security, threats to security, and protection of one’s person, family, in-group, nation, etc. Generally an action or a call to action that can be taken to protect the welfare of a person, group, nation sometimes from a not yet manifested threat” (p.4). In total nine stories were identified as using the *Security and Defense Frame*, constituting 6.81 percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Law and Order*, *Crime and Justice Frames* (eight times) and *Policy Prescription and Evaluation*

*Frames* (eight times), followed by *Health and Safety Frames* (seven times), *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* (four times), *Political Frames* (two times), *Capacity and Resources Frames* (two times) and *Quality of Life Frames* (one time). There was extensive coverage of the Gubernatorial primary debates in which candidates sparred over solutions to the opioid crisis. For the most part there was agreement over proposals to increase funding for treatment and prevention, but when it came to the issue of “militarizing” the border between Massachusetts and New Hampshire there were stark differences. For example, one program featured a clip of Republican hopeful Jeanie Forrester advocating for a “high intensity task force area along the border” .... “where most of the drugs are coming in.” The area along the border that Forrester is referring to is the stretch north of Lawrence Massachusetts, which includes a major corridor to Concord and Manchester—New Hampshire’s largest population centers. Chris Sununu, the eventual winner of the gubernatorial race clapped back, claiming that, “militarizing the border between New Hampshire and Massachusetts is a terrible idea.” In a later interview, however, Sununu, blamed Lawrence, Massachusetts for his state’s fentanyl problem, advocating for sending New Hampshire state police across the border to go after suspected drug dealers. “We’re going across borders, you better get ready,” Sununu said. “We’re going in and we’re going to get tough on these guys. I want to scare every dealer that wants to come across that border” (CBS Local Boston). Here, the security and defense frames that are utilized frequently by Trump in his rhetoric about the Southern border, are distilled and localized to fit the regional context of the Merrimack Valley.

## 12. Health and Safety Frames

According to Boydston et al (2013) *Health and Safety Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, “Healthcare access and effectiveness, illness, disease, sanitation, obesity, mental health effects, prevention of or perpetuation of gun violence, infrastructure and building safety” (p.5). By far the most commonly utilized frame was the Health and Safety Frame. At 107 stories, this represents 81.06 percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* (57 times), *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames* (35 times), *Quality of Life Frames* (25 times), *Capacity and Resource Frames* (14 times), *Political Frames* (14 times), *Morality Frames* (11 times), *Security and Defense Frames* (seven times), *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* (seven times), *Public Opinion Frames* (5 times), *Economic Frames* (one time). In the sample of 107 stories, opioid overdose was a frequent topic of discussion, with 62 segments featuring overdose coverage. Overdose coverage was often conjoined with discussions about public health initiatives to curb addiction and fatalities from drugs, including improving access to the overdose reducing drug, Narcan, the Safe Station program, vaccines for preventing fatal overdoses, and increasing funding for treatment and prevention. The overdose coverage also served as public warnings about the discovery of deadly opioid analogs in New Hampshire communities, such as carfentanyl and u47700. Through this coverage WMUR performs a public service by advising residents of the grave health and safety risks posed by opioid consumption. For example, one report features the following warning:

This is a new form of fentanyl discovered in the last year, linked to 46 deaths nationwide, including one so far here in New Hampshire. Its official name is u47700, but it's referred sometimes by the street name pink, and according to the state's drug czar has also tested

at the state lab. The D.E.A. has sent out a notice of emergency action placing u47700 into schedule 1 of the controlled substances act, which criminalizes its particular molecular analog. It's yet another worry for those struggling with addiction, their families and those on the front lines.

Amid the coverage there were several calls from family members of overdose victims, law enforcement officers, health professionals and policymakers to “destigmatize addiction” by looking at it as a disease rather than a choice. One Doctor told WMUR, “we have to help people understand that this is not a disease of choice or a character flaw, this is in fact a chronic disease of the brain,” while a representative from American Ambulance explained, “I can look at it from a clinical perspective, we need to look at from the socioeconomic perspective, the demographic perspective and really understand who is at risk most and why are they at risk most.” With more focus on public health, there have been some significant lexical changes in way addiction is talked about—specifically the preference for clinical and diagnostical terms, rather than criminological ones. Many reports described addiction also used the less pejorative phrase ‘substance use disorder’ to refer to ‘addiction.’ These lexical changes are representative of a wider movement to changing the ways people talk about, and by extension, perceive addiction. In 2017 U.S. drug czar, Michael Botticelli issued a memorandum to heads of executive departments and agencies encouraging public officials to use medical terminology when referring to “addiction” as well as first person “non-stigmatizing terminology.” For example, individuals once referred to as drug addicts or substance abusers are now, “persons with a substance use disorder.” The humanizing qualities of person-first, medicalized terminology may not only change the way people talk and think about addiction, but also the ways addiction is treated.

It can be argued that the way addiction is framed in discourse has been instrumental to the growth of the public health mission to treat substance misuse, especially in the medical and law enforcement communities. For example, police officers, have in many New Hampshire communities have taken on the de-facto role of emergency medical service providers. This may mean giving treatment referrals to individuals found in possession of narcotics or administering Narcan on the spot—and the increased public health role of law enforcement is reflected in the reporting. A rare “feel-good” story about the opioid crisis in New Hampshire, for example, details how one overdose survivor thanked Manchester police for saving their life with a dose of Narcan. A WMUR reporter explains,

A person who was revived by Narcan is thanking Manchester police for saving their life. They [the Manchester Police Department] tweeted the thank you e-mail. They said “Thank you Manchester police department for saving my life. I'm sorry and ashamed of myself. Words cannot describe how thankful I am.” The e-mailer said they will keep working on staying clean. In response, Chief Willard said quote “I'm very proud of the person and humbled by what officers do every day and night. no doubt about it, a big thank you to them.” I'm sure that meant a lot to the department.

This story is one example of how the opioid crisis has forced police officers to take on greater public health responsibilities. It also depicts a manifestly humane and compassionate response from law enforcement—a marked departure from the tough attitudes on addiction that defined the war on drugs for decades.

### **13. Quality of Life Frames**

According to Boydston et al (2013), *Quality of Life Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, “The effects of a policy on individuals’ wealth, mobility, access to resources, happiness, social structures, ease of day-to-day routines, quality of community life, etc.” (p.5). In total were 25 stories identified as utilizing *Quality of Life Frames*, constituting 18.93

percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* (19 times), followed by *Law and Order Frames* (nine times), *Capacity and Resource Frames* (three times), *Political Frames* (three times), *Public Opinion Frames* (two times), *Security and Defense Frames* (one time). Most of the reports referenced the rising overdose rates in New Hampshire, and the need for greater access to treatment services, often using personal stories of addiction to demonstrate the impact of opioids on the wellbeing of citizens. These stories usually follow a standard script—A white middle-class adolescent or young adult—often a star athlete or model student—finds him or herself on a path of addiction, often realizing treatment services are unavailable or inaccessible. This is the case of the Courtney Griffin story as well as Travis Stadler, detailed in the following transcript of a WMUR report:

Reporter: When Milford high school won a football state title in 2003, it was a high point in the young life of Travis Stadler, but he's already on his path to addiction. The young man you see here making this tackle twice.

Travis: I think I was about 12 years old, yeah, playing baseball and I had a knee injury

Reporter: Another sports injury in his teens yielded another prescription, and by the time he graduated pills were a part of life. In 2012 his addiction escalated to heroin.

Travis: And your brain is like, eating and drinking and breathing air.

Reporter: After spending more than half a year in jail, he's sober now and is working as a recovery coach.

Travis: It's a tough thing to go through, but with a little support and someone showing that you're worth it and they care about you, that goes a long way

Reporter: Right around the time that Travis moved from pills to heroin, the state of New Hampshire was hitting rock bottom, too, in terms of the money it dedicated in fighting addiction.

This report is typical of the coverage of New Hampshire's opioid epidemic. The crisis is regularly presented as a threat to the stability of the suburban middle-class—both existential



and humanistic. The anecdotal narratives from survivors and family members help to frame the crisis as one that endangers New Hampshire's most cherished attributes—it's prosperity, it's quality of life and its image as a bucolic refuge.

#### **14. Cultural Identity Frames**

According to Boydston et al (2013) *Cultural Identity Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, "The social norms, trends, values and customs constituting culture(s), as they relate to a specific policy issue" (p. 5). There were no stories coded as Cultural Identity Frames.

#### **15. Public Opinion Frames**

According to Boydston et al (2013) *Public Opinion Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, "References to general social attitudes, polling and demographic information, as well as implied or actual consequences of diverging from or getting ahead of public opinion or polls" (p. 5). In total there were eight stories identified as utilizing the *Public Opinion Frame*, constituting 6 percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Health and Safety Frames* (five times) and *Security and Defense Frames* (five times), followed by *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* (three times), *Quality of Life Frames* (two times), *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames* (one time), *Morality Frames* (one time), and *Political Frames* (one time). There were multiple stories that cited WMUR's own poll, which indicated that heading into the 2016 election, New Hampshire voters considered the opioid crisis to be the most important issue. For example, one reporter stated, "polls tell us that New Hampshire residents see the drug crisis as the top issue facing the state," and another recounted that "44% of adults in New Hampshire see drug abuse, and addiction as the number one issue, twice those who cited jobs as the top issue." These public

opinion surveys not only provide psychographic information vital for political candidates aiming to win the support of voters, they also offer the news station a glimpse into what viewers consider to be the most important issues. In a television market where ratings determine profits, knowledge of viewers' priorities allows news networks to customize coverage to attract audiences. From a political economic perspective, these factors may explain the relatively extensive coverage that the opioid crisis received—as simply a reflex to the interests, perspective and informational demands of New Hampshire viewers. WMUR even received a reward for its coverage of the opioid crisis, marking its dedication to investigative reporting on the issue.

## 16. Political frames

According to Boydston et al. (2013) *Political Frames* are framing devices that emphasize,

Any political considerations surrounding an issue. Issue actions or efforts or stances that are political, such as partisan filibusters, lobbyist involvement, bipartisan efforts, deal-making and vote trading, appealing to one's base, mentions of political maneuvering. Explicit statements that a policy issue is good or bad for a particular political party (p.5)

In total there were 21 stories identified as using the Political Frame, constituting 15.9 percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Policy Prescription and Evaluation* (15 times), followed by *Health and Safety Frames* (14 times) *Capacity and Resource Frames* (eight times), *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames* (six times), *Quality of Life Frames* (three times), *Security and Defense Frames* (two times), *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* (two times), and *Public Opinion Frames* (one time). As a battleground state and home to one of the nation's first presidential primaries, New Hampshire is a hotbed of fierce political rhetoric. In the immediate period before the

2016 election hundreds of political ads were aired, political rallies were covered, and debates between gubernatorial, congressional and presidential candidates were broadcast live, and cut up into soundbites for political news segments. On many occasions, statements from then presidential candidate Donald Trump were also circulated and amplified through broadcast airwaves. Trump's bombast, pomp and hyperbole on the campaign trail in New Hampshire was particularly highlighted in WMUR's coverage—similar to the pattern seen across much of the media leading up to and after the election. Covering a Trump rally in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, for example, WMUR chose to repeat and thus amplify Trump's claim that Hillary Clinton was on drugs during the last Presidential debated one. In an October story just days before the election one correspondent reported that Trump is, "claiming his opponent, Hillary Clinton was on drugs during the last presidential debate, and now Trump says there should be testing prior to the debates. The same segment features a clip of Trump proclaiming, "We will take back the white house and make America great again," followed by a reporter commenting, "if elected president he'll work to address the state's opioid crisis." Another clip features the then candidate Donald Trump pronouncing, "When I won the primary, I promised the people of New Hampshire that I would stop drugs from pouring into your community. Remember that. I said strongly. I'm going to do it." In yet another story covering an October 2016 rally in Manchester, New Hampshire, candidate Trump is featured saying, "I said no way, you look beautiful streams and lakes and everything else, I said this is not heroin country. It is heroin country." In this same speech Trump proclaimed, "A wall will not only keep out dangerous cartels and criminals, but it will also keep out the drugs and heroin that's poisoning our youth." Another story announced two high profile Trump endorsements from New England sports legends, Tom Brady and Bill Belichick. The report

continues with a defiant Trump proclaiming, “[Hillary Clinton] is being protected by a totally rigged system” and concludes with a reporter “He also said he would stop the opioid crisis.” Significantly, there were no stories in the sample which featured direct statements from Hilary Clinton, nor any that outlined the presidential candidate’s political position on the opioid crisis.

In a state where the opioid crisis ranked as the number one issue for voters, the amplification of Trump’s campaign rhetoric, and simultaneous muting of Clinton’s may have a significant impact—though the extent or nature of this cannot be ascertained fully. Nevertheless, through conjecture it may be concluded that the amplification of Trump’s rhetoric animated his base and potentially drew in hesitant supporters concerned about New Hampshire’s opioid crisis—and at the same time provided a counter-narrative to Trump’s inflammatory and insensitive, “drug-infested den” comment.

### **17. External Regulation and Reputation Frames**

According to Boydston et al. (2013) *External Regulation and Reputation Frames* are framing devices that emphasize, “The United States’ external relations with another nation; the external relations of one state with another; or relations between groups. This includes trade agreements and outcomes, comparisons of policy outcomes or desired policy outcomes “(p.5). In total eight stories were identified as utilizing the *External Regulation and Reputation Frame*, constituting six percent of the entire sample. These stories were most frequently cross-coded with *Health and Safety Frames* (seven times) and *Policy Prescription and Evaluation Frames* (seven times), followed by *Law and Order, Crime and Justice Frames* (four times), *Security and Defense Frames* (four times), *Morality Frames* (two times), *Political Frames* (two times), and *Capacity and Resource Frames* (one time). Most of

the stories coded into this framing category focused on New Hampshire's external relations with Massachusetts, particularly with regard to the trafficking of narcotics across state lines. A similar theme was present in coverage of external relations between the U.S. and Mexico, but with focus on trafficking across the Southern border.

## **18. Other Frames.**

According to Boydston et al (2013) *Other Frames* are framing devices that "...that do not fit into the above categories" (p. 5). There were no "other" frames identified.

## **D. Discussion**

The results of this chapter suggest that WMUR's coverage most often frames the opioid crisis as an issue that can be addressed through public health interventions. This contradicts one of the few studies that has examined news framing of the opioid crisis. McGuinty et al (2016) examined 673 news stories about opioid analgesic abuse over the 15 year period from 1998-2012. The results of their analysis, "suggest that the news media more often frame the problem as a criminal justice issue" (McGuinty et al, 2016, p. 405). More specifically it was found that the news stories most frequently mentioned illegal drug dealing as the cause of the problem, and law enforcement interventions "...designed to arrest and prosecute the individuals responsible for diverting opioid analgesics onto the illegal market..." were the most frequently mentioned solution (McGuinty et al., 2016, p. 405). Surprisingly, fewer than 5% of the news stories mentioned expanding access to substance abuse treatments. Significantly, however, the study found that prevention-oriented approaches were mentioned more frequently in the later years of the study period, suggesting public health frames were trending upwards in the early 2010's. Ultimately, the authors conclude that the " findings

underscore the need for a concerted effort to reframe opioid analgesic abuse as a treatable condition addressable via well-established public and behavioral health approaches” (McGuinty et al, 2016, p. 405). In another study of opioid-related content and public comments on the Facebook pages of 42 Ohio newspapers between 2013-2017, it was also found that recovery and treatment frames were not as frequently utilized as other frames. According to the study the most frequently utilized frame was *Awareness of the Opioid Epidemic and Affected Populations* (34% of all posted content), followed by *Programs, Policies, and Interventions* (29.5%) *Crime, Punishment, Legal Cases, and Law Enforcement* (28.2%) and *Narratives of Addiction and the Long Road to Recovery* (8.3%) (Russell, Spence, and Thames, 2016). This demonstrates that even in localized contexts such as Ohio, where the opioid epidemic has ravaged suburban white communities, public health and treatment are not frequently discussed in news coverage. If we compare this coverage to the crack epidemic, which dominated drug-related news coverage during the 1990’s, there are still marked differences. In one of the only published studies on Heroin-related news coverage during the 1990’s, Denham (2008) found that Heroin was frequently associated with fashion, musicians, and film. To observe patterns in public discourses circulating about heroin in the 1990’s, Denham performed a content analysis of 1770 heroin-related news articles published in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* during a 16-year period between 1988 and 2003. Citing empirical evidence from data gathered on heroin-related news stories, Denham (2008) shows that there were marked increases in references to fashion models, films, and musicians in heroin-related news articles in the mid 1990’s. For Denham this rise corresponds naturally with an emergent trend of “Heroin chic” in popular culture, “characterized by emaciated, disheveled fashion models and film actors, as well as the

symbolic death of music icon Kurt Cobain” (p. 945). According to Denham (2008) the generation of a heroin chic aesthetic and related discourses in the news served to amplify the threat of heroin and create a moral panic around heroin addiction.

Although valuable for its heuristic analysis, Denham’s (2008) study falls short in three areas. First Denham (2008) never fully considers how these media messages could be decoded to produce a range of contradictory meanings. The amplification of discourses about heroin in relation to pop culture may very well serve to elicit fear and moral panic, but could also produce sympathy, compassion, and curiosity, among a number of other affective responses. Second, Denham never examines how race and class factor into media representations and audience reception of bodies that enact the heroin chic aesthetic. Rocker, Kurt Cobain, actor, Robert Downey Jr., and supermodel, Kate Moss, as well as popular films such as *Basketball Diaries*, and *Pulp Fiction* all embody, not only ‘heroin chic’ but also white, middle class America. Yet there is no discussion about how race, given its long and complicated relationship with the war on drugs influences the social construction of folk devils and moral panics. At the same time there is no accounting for how ‘chic,’ as a signifier of fashion and high status, advances a classed rhetoric that speaks to the economic aspirations of the middle class. Denham’s (2008) analysis, which employs Hall et al.s’ (1978) and Cohen’s (1972) conceptual framework of deviance amplification to explain the public reaction to heroin-related representations, is impressive in its scope and specificity, but lacks serious consideration of the racializing force within moral panics. In the 1990’s drug crazed “superpredators” occupy a mythic space in the public imagination—folk devils responsible for the rapid fraying of social order. The idolized heroin-addicted model or musician occupies an aspirational space on the other hand—a far distance from the folk devil

archetype. Disturbing imagery of drug dealers and crack babies in gritty inner-city environments presents a dramatic juxtaposition to the stylized heroin chic aesthetic in fashion magazines. The result is representational bifurcation: Urban black populations are condensed into a powerful symbol of deviance and peril, while the chic, white heroin users are represented through a stylish, aspirational aesthetic.

Past research has examined how film (Denham, 2008) and print articles (Denham, 2010) contribute to moral panics about illicit drug use, but few studies, if any examine how deviance and threats to social order can arise from TV news coverage of the opioid crisis. While we may never fully comprehend the range of audience reactions to opioid-related coverage, the current study does suggest that there were divergent discourses in opioid-related coverage, which can may produce divergent responses. For example, discourses linking the opioid crisis to immigration were frequently amplified, magnifying the perceived threat from immigrant populations. Simultaneously, coverage of opioid abuse in New Hampshire was frequently framed as a public health issue rather than a criminal one, thus emboldening citizens to advocate for treatment and recovery services.

Similar to 1990's coverage of war on drugs, representational patterns were split along racial lines. When Donald Trump promises to prevent drugs from pouring over the border and into New Hampshire and other local politicians call for militarizing the border between New Hampshire and Massachusetts familiar folk devils are being summoned. At the same time medicalized discourses about addiction can unsettle the referential fixity between drug use and criminality, and thereby assuage the burden of stigma.

The present study has attempted to map out the predominant representational themes in WMUR's coverage of the opioid crisis, leading up to the 2016 election, The results of the



suggest, at least in a localized context of New Hampshire, that the opioid crisis is portrayed as public health issue that requires public health interventions, such as greater access to treatment and recovery services. There was not, however a direct overlap between WMUR's portrayals and the discourses of state actors, particularly members of the executive, legislative, and branches of the government. While Donald Trump and Jeffrey Sessions have frequently linked the opioid crisis in New Hampshire to border, immigration, and sanctuary policies this was not a prevalent theme in WMUR's coverage. Some inconsistency is to be expected as Hall et al. (1978) has pointed out the media and the state are frequently in opposition:

Since the media are institutionally distinct from the other agencies of the state, they do not automatically take their lead from the state. Indeed, oppositions can and frequently do arise between these institutions within the complex of power in society. The media are also impelled by institutional motives and rationales which are different from those of other sectors of the state; for example, the competitive drive to be 'first with the news' may not be immediately in the interest or to the advantage of the state. The media often want to find out things which the primary definers would rather keep quiet (p. 65).

Regardless of these oppositions, this line of research may be used to further explore the link between issue salience and voter behavior. With polls suggesting that the opioid crisis was the most important issue for New Hampshire voters, by a wide margin, it is vitally important to understand how news, information and candidates' positions about the issue are framed, packaged and relayed to the public. In New Hampshire, the opioid issue was a salient theme in campaign messaging, with many candidates striking a compassionate tone. While past research has indicated that areas most impacted by the opioid epidemic had greater support for Trump, little is understood about the role of the news in mediating this response. Analysis of opioid-related coverage on WMUR shows that Trump's rhetoric about the opioid crisis was amplified, while Hillary Clinton's positions on the issue were largely silenced.

Could this help to explain how Trump earned large gains in many parts of New Hampshire, like most of the areas in the Midwest ravaged by the opioid crisis? Although Clinton won the popular vote in New Hampshire by less than 3,000 votes coming away with 47.62% of ballots cast, compared to Trump's 47.25, this margin is far narrower than the 2016 election, in which Obama ran away with 51.98 percent of the votes, compared to Romney's 46.40 percent. Similar to other swing states in the Midwest, several counties flipped from Obama in 2012 to Trump in 2016, including Coos County, Sullivan County, Hillsborough County. The swing was particularly pronounced in Coos County, which has the highest drug, alcohol and suicide mortality rate in New England. Coos County was once a democratic stronghold, with Obama winning by nearly 20 points in 2008, and again by more than 17 points in 2012. But in the 2016 election, the county swung dramatically to the right, with Trump winning by nearly 10 points (New Hampshire Election Results, 2017, Aug 1).

Further research may provide a more detailed map to account for the complex relationships between political discourse, media framing, and voter behavior. With the 2020 election quickly approaching such information would be of immense value for politicians, pollsters, and citizens alike. According to a 2018 Gallup poll, health care was the most important issue for voters, ahead of the economy and immigration and with the opioid crisis increasingly framed as a public health concern, it may prove to be a decisive issue in the 2020 election (Newport, 2018, Nov 2).

## CHAPTER IV

### DOLLAR STORE JUNKIE: OVERDOSE AS SPECTACLE

#### A. Introduction

This chapter examines the textual and visual rhetoric of the war on opioid addiction in The Merrimack Valley region that connects New Hampshire and Massachusetts, by evaluating statements and images produced and circulated by various local and national actors, including the media, the police, and policymakers. The dramatic rise in opioid abuse in the Merrimack Valley has been accompanied by a growing ‘moral panic’, which has increasingly taken on racial dimensions, and is reflected in public discourses, policy actions, as well as policing practices on the ground. In this socio-geographical context and in context of the insights provided by Stuart Hall, Stanley Cohen and other scholars who have examined previous ‘moral panics’, this study attempts to map out the complex interplay between the news media, law enforcement, and policymakers in producing, circulating, amplifying, and sustaining public anxiety about the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley and beyond. Drawing from Stuart Hall’s seminal work, *Policing the Crisis: The State, Mugging and Law and Order*, this chapter seeks to cultivate greater knowledge of how contemporary discourses about race and class, generated by law enforcement, policymakers, and citizens are circulated and amplified through media coverage of opioid overdose as well as the illicit distribution and use of opioids.

By tracking and analyzing images and text related to three high-profile cases involving opioid overdose in the Merrimack Valley, this study attempts to explain how discourses about deviancy and threats to social order are produced, constructed, circulated online. The first case is centered on Mandy McGowan of Salem New Hampshire, whose overdose in a

Family Dollar store in Lawrence Massachusetts was recorded on a cell phone and spread virally across social media and subsequently received intense coverage by regional and national news networks (see figure 14). The second image (see figure 15) is part of a group of photos memorializing, Courtney Griffin of New Hampshire, whose fatal overdose at the age of 20, sparked regional and national discussions about drug policy. The third image (see image 16) is a portrait of 11-year old Precious Wallace, whose sudden death in Lawrence, MA, sparked a lengthy investigation. Toxicology reports indicated that she had fentanyl in her system when she died, and investigators concluded that she was fatally drugged and raped by her great uncle. All of the stories are tragic reminders of the toll opioids have taken on communities in the Merrimack Valley, all received considerable media attention, and significantly, all three are female. Mandy McGowan and Courtney Griffin are white, while Precious Wallace is Afro-Latina. While this study examines only three cases of opioid overdose in the Merrimack Valley there have been hundreds of similar incidents in recent history. The three cases were chosen, as they were most widely discussed in public forums

Using the iconographic tracking methodology outlined by Gries (2013) this study tracks the digital dissemination of these images and related discourses to examine how stories about the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley are circulated. Working at the intersection of cultural studies and circulation studies, this study considers how discourses about the race and class constructed through the circulation of written and visual texts. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section examines the Merrimack Valley's opioid crisis in historical, political and cultural context by mapping out the legacies of race, class and conflict in the region. The second section examines the viral spectacles around overdose, focusing on the ways in which various affective responses to overdose, including grief,

stigma, compassion, and punitive retribution, are produced and circulated online. The third section builds on contemporary cultural studies perspectives on race and crime elaborated in Hall et al.'s. (1978) seminal study, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State and Law and Order* to examine how the viral circulation of overdose imagery can produce racialized moral panics. The fourth section is devoted to developing an interdisciplinary methodological framework for applying approaches for tracking and analyzing 'visual rhetoric.' In the fifth and sixth sections respectively, results are presented and discussed. Outlined in the final section are conclusions and directions for future research.



Figure 14: Widely circulated thumbnail image from video of Mandy McGowan as she lay on conscious on the floor of a Lawrence Massachusetts Family Dollar Store



Figure 15: One of the photos used to memorialize Courtney Griffin



Figure 16: Portrait of Precious Wallaces

## 1. Border Wars: Race, Class and Conflict in the Merrimack Valley

This section examines the opioid crisis in the geographical specificity of the Merrimack Valley, a bi-state region that spreads out along the Merrimack River and spans across the Massachusetts-New Hampshire line. In Massachusetts, the Merrimack Valley includes the cities of Lawrence, Lowell and Haverill, and many other small towns, and in New Hampshire, the region includes the cities of Concord, Manchester, and Salem, among many others (See figure 17 below).



Figure 17: Map of the Merrimack Valley region

The Merrimack Valley was once the epicenter of a thriving textile industry, with Lowell, Massachusetts at one time being the nation's largest textile center in the nation. Lawrence, Massachusetts was the nation's first planned industrial city and Manchester, New Hampshire at one time boasted the largest cotton textile factory in the world. Irish, English, French Canadian, and German immigrants came in droves to work the factories—earning modest wages for long hours of labor (Cole, 2002). After World War II, however, the Merrimack Valley's textile industry collapsed, leaving thousands of laborers without work. As the

Merrimack Valley deindustrialized, and urban centers experienced rapid decay, many whites left for the suburbs. Simultaneously the Merrimack Valley saw a new wave immigration from the Dominican Republic, Cambodia, Vietnam and Puerto Rico, with many settling in Lawrence, MA—earning it the moniker, “Immigrant City” The arrival of new Black, Asian, and Latinx immigrants set off tense competition for jobs in the region and bred racial antagonisms (Barber, 2017). The hostilities reached a pinnacle in the 1980’s as Lawrence’s Latinx population tripled. On the evening of August 8, 1984, what started as a family feud, erupted into racial violence between Latino and white youth, resulting in exchanges of gunfire, rock throwing and burned buildings. In the wake of riot, the Mayor of Lawrence declared a state of emergency and enforced a three-day curfew (Campbell, 1984, Aug 11). A 1984 *New York Times* report on the riot featured the following coverage:

The feelings of residents against the Hispanic newcomers run remarkably high in some quarters. One businessman in his 60's, who chose not to be named, said of the violence: "It had to come. This used to be a good city but you get all these Spanish people in here and 90 percent of them don't work. I think they're pushy people." He mentioned daily crowds of Hispanic people outside the welfare office on Lawrence Street. "You never see a white person there," he asserted. (Campbell, 1984, Aug 11, para. 17).

The ongoing opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley rages against this historical backdrop and is tinged with racial hostilities that have been simmering for decades. New Hampshire Governor, Chris Sununu, tapped into these racial anxieties when he proposed that law enforcement should be able to cross state lines to target “undocumented drug dealers.” (Germano, 2017 Mar 2). In a Concord, New Hampshire speech, the same anxieties were activated by Jeff Sessions, when he highlighted the arrest and detention opioid trafficking suspects including "four illegal aliens residing in the sanctuary city of Lawrence, Massachusetts." The sting nabbing the suspects was aptly named “Operation Law and Order.”



It is also the case when U.S. Attorney Andrew Lelling claims, “Lawrence is a clearing house for illegal drugs pouring into New Hampshire and Maine via 93 and 495” (Anderson, 2018, Jul 12). Donald Trump spoke to these racial anxieties when he proclaimed, “Ending sanctuary cities is crucial to stopping the drug addiction crisis” in a March 2018 speech in the Merrimack Valley city of Manchester, New Hampshire (Dezenski, 2017, Oct 28). Trump also spoke to these anxieties when he made the unsubstantiated claim that, “the sanctuary city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, is one of the primary sources of fentanyl in six New Hampshire counties” (Ortiz, 2018, Mar 19). Two of the six counties referenced by Trump, Rockingham, and Hillsborough, sit at the heart of New Hampshire’s Merrimack Valley. Both counties border the Massachusetts line, and both went to Trump in the 2016. Hillsborough county, it should be noted, flipped from Obama in 2012 to Trump in 2016.

With the release of *Lawtown*, a 75-minute documentary produced by Los Angeles-based Anthem Films, Hollywood has also capitalized on these anxieties. The documentary chronicles Lawrence’s struggles with opioids, crime and corruption, packing all of the most potent fears symbolized by the “Immigrant City” into graphic interviews and imagery that depict the city as overrun by addicts and drug dealers. A March 10, 2019 Eagle-Tribune feature offers this synopsis:

The documentary's visuals are stark, including a succession of broadcast news clips of some of the city's worst moments over the last few years: a bullet-riddled body laying in a downtown gutter; a toddler tugging at her overdosed mother lying unconscious in a Dollar Store aisle in a video first published by The Eagle-Tribune; a New Hampshire governor denouncing Lawrence as the cause of his state's drug problems; police searching for evidence at the riverfront site where a teenage boy was beheaded two years ago; homeless encampments and shooting galleries under the Casey Bridge (Eddings, 2019, Mar 10, para. 8).

The doomsday portrayals in *Lawtown* offer a familiarly simplistic narrative repeated by local and national political figures—that immigrants are responsible for the region’s raging

opioid crisis. For white families in New Hampshire seeing the destruction reaped by opioid addiction, the immigrant community just across the border, can become a convenient scapegoat, and the rhetoric of Trump and Sununu certainly does nothing to counter the “immigrant explanation.” It may also explain their success in many areas of New Hampshire. Both were able to conjure deep fears about identity and race that could be displaced onto a familiar “Folk devil”—immigrants. The use of a crisis to stoke a moral panic about immigration is not a new strategy. Stuart Hall famously observed this pattern in the rise of Thatcherism. In the contemporary iteration the “Immigrant City” comes to represent all of society’s fears about the disintegration of social order, about crime, about drugs, about the economy, about white identity, and about despair.

The staggering rise of opioid addiction in New England is reflective of a national trend. The problem is especially acute in Massachusetts and New Hampshire where opioid overdose are now the leading cause of injury death, surpassing both motor-vehicle accidents and homicides (CDC.gov, 2015). In 2015 alone there were 1,531 Opioid-related deaths in Massachusetts, up significantly from 532 in 2010 (Massachusetts Department of Public Health , 2018). In response to the rising death toll, Massachusetts, in March of 2014 former Governor, Deval Patrick declared a public health emergency—the first declaration of its kind. As part of Patrick’s emergency plan, 20 million dollars was set aside to establish treatment and recovery services, and the Opioid Task Force was launched to prevent opioid addiction and misuse. In addition, all Massachusetts first responders were permitted to carry Narcan (Naloxone), which is used to reverse the symptoms of an opioid overdose (MacQuarrie, 2014, Mar 27).

Opioids are killing in rural, suburban, and urban communities alike. According to data from the CDC the economically challenged mill town of Lawrence, Massachusetts, which lies north of

Boston, and within minutes of the New Hampshire line, has the highest opioid related deaths per person in New England, at a rate of 1 opioid related death per 1,008 (Number of Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths, All Intents by City/Town 2014-2018, 2019, Mar). As a predominantly Latinx community (with approximately three quarters of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latinx) this trend contradicts popular perceptions that opioids are exclusively impacting white populations in suburban and rural communities.

The situation to the north is just as bad, if not worse, with New Hampshire claiming the third highest rate of opioid related deaths among all states, behind only West Virginia and Ohio (Scholl et al., 2019, Jan 4). In New Hampshire, fentanyl is by far the biggest killer. According to 2018 Department of Justice statistics, in New Hampshire, fentanyl was a factor in 366 out of 397 opiate/opioid related deaths. Heroin alone (not cut with any other drugs) accounted for only 1 death (New Hampshire Department of Justice, 2018). Manchester, New Hampshire's most populous city, lying at the heart of the Merrimack Valley, has been especially hard hit, but increased availability of Narcan seems to be slowing the rate of deaths due to opioids. In 2018, Manchester saw a 24% decrease in overdose deaths compared to the previous year, and most attribute this decline to wider availability of the overdose reversing drug, Narcan (Cherry, 2018, Dec 28). Manchester has also been an innovator in addiction recovery, in 2016 piloting a program called "safe station" that invites anyone to walk into the fire station, day or night, to seek recovery services. In less than 3 years of operation the safe station had recorded more than 5,000 visits (Feathers, 2019, Feb 1). As Fire Chief Dan Goonan told the Manchester-based *Union Leader*:

The things that make it so effective are that you come in, we're here, we're non-judgmental, it's a stigma-free zone, it's face to face, we evaluate people and we don't ask for insurance. (Feathers, 2019, Feb 1).

In 2018 even Donald Trump paid a visit to Manchester's safe station, proclaiming in the presence of Governor Chris Sununu and Fire Chief Dan Goonan, "you save a lot of lives. I've been reading a lot about it. You save a lot of lives" (Feathers, 2019, Feb 1).

With fentanyl related deaths in New Hampshire reaching record heights, and the ratcheting up of rhetoric reinforcing Lawrence's reputation as a "fentanyl hub," cross-border tensions have flared. The complicated histories between working class whites and Latinxs in the Merrimack Valley have only exacerbated these hostilities.

## **2. "Overdose Porn"**

This is part of a larger trend sweeping across the Internet; shock videos showing individuals in the thralls of overdose, many as their children watch on. Kelmae Hemphill, a New Jersey woman, was recorded by her own drug dealer as she lay passed out on the pavement and is resuscitated by quick acting medics. In 2016, a bystander live-streamed a video of a middle-age couple passed out by a Memphis bus stop as onlookers mocked and laughed at them. In Boynton Beach Florida, June Schwienhart and a friend snorted heroin and passed out in their vehicle with their infant children in the back seat, and when police and paramedics arrived the entire scene was captured on body cameras. (Seelye et al. 2018, Dec 18). The Boynton Beach, police later released the video on YouTube, which drew over 69,000 views. A video of a couple passed out in the front seat as their infant child cried and hungrily reached for a bottle, was also posted to the Facebook page of the Valusia County, Florida sheriff's office. The video was viewed over 163,000 times, shared more than 500 times, and received over 450 comments (Ugwu, 2017, Oct 26). Police in Columbus, Ohio also released a photo of couple passed out beside their vehicle, as a baby sat inside the hot

car, “covered in sweat.” East Liverpool, Ohio police released a photo capturing a similar scene—a couple passed out in the front seat of a car as the woman’s four-year old grandchild looks on (see figure 18 below). The photo quickly went viral, shared more than 27,000 times on Facebook and drawing more than 12,000 comments (Brown, 2018, Dec 18). The post contains a warning of graphic content and the following justification for releasing the photo:

We feel it necessary to show the other side of this horrible drug. We feel we need to be a voice for the children caught up in this horrible mess. This child can't speak for himself but we are hopeful his story can convince another user to think twice about injecting this poison while having a child in their custody.

We are well aware that some may be offended by these images and for that we are truly sorry, but it is time that the non drug using public sees what we are now dealing with on a daily basis. The poison known as heroin has taken a strong grip on many communities not just ours, the difference is we are willing to fight this problem until it's gone and if that means we offend a few people along the way we are prepared to deal with that. (City of East Liverpool, Ohio, 2016, Sep 8)

The viral photo sparked a national conversation about the opioid crisis and became the face of an epidemic that has ravaged East Liverpool, Ohio, and other similar communities struggling with widespread addiction. East Liverpool, Ohio, like many other economically struggling communities in the Midwest, Appalachia, and New England, has felt the worst ravages of the opioid epidemic. But law enforcement in many cases claim that these images help them in their daily fight against drugs. One year after the photo went viral, WKBN, the CBS affiliate station in Youngstown Ohio, covered the effects of the image that put the small town of East Liverpool in the national spotlight. East Liverpool Chief of Police, John Lane, claimed that "The awareness of the public wasn't there, but when that picture came out, you can no longer deny there was a problem." There was also marked decrease in overdoses East Liverpool in the year that followed and the police department was awarded a \$50,000 grant

to help addicts after an encounter with law enforcement, though neither of these can be attributed directly to the release of the photo (Marcel, 2017, Sep 7).



Figure 18: Viral photo of unconscious East Liverpool, Ohio couple

Among other effects of these viral spectacles is that addicts, once anonymous and living mostly in the shadows, are thrust immediately into the national spotlight, reaching widespread notoriety. In some cases, the videos, and the public shaming that follows, have spurred addicts to seek recovery. For example, Kelmae Hemphill, whose overdose was recorded and by her dealer, told the New York Times, “If that video never happened, I probably would have never went to treatment at all,” In other cases, it has only amplified the stigma of drug use, driving users further into the spiral of addiction (Seelye et al. 2018, Dec 18).

These viral spectacles also represent a novel form of cultural production—shocking images and videos of overdoses recorded without consent from the subjects and circulated through various channels for public consumption. It can be argued that the viral photos and videos correspond to what Douglas Kellner (2003) has called media spectacles, or, “those

phenomena of media culture that embody society's basic values, serve to initiate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of conflict resolution" (p. 2). The voyeuristic spectacles of crime and punishment commonly found in American popular culture, such as the iconic TV series, *Cops* (FOX) and *Lockup* (MSNBC) promote what Michelle Brown (2009) has called a '*culture of punishment*'.

According to this framework, such 'reality' television representations, "...allow citizens distanced from the material experiences of crime and punishment to participate in punitive spectacles and engage in moral judgment from afar (Linneman and Wall, 2013 p. 320).

Linneman and Wall (2019) demonstrate this in their analysis of the Oregon Sheriffs Department's 'Faces of Meth' campaign aimed at deterring Methamphetamine use. The 'Faces of Meth' campaign utilizes mug shots of meth addicts as a 'penal spectacle' to educate the populace about the bodily and criminological effects of meth. The rural 'white trash' aesthetic expressed in most of the mug shots meanwhile, "helps reaffirm meth's cultural boundaries along clean, yet crude racial lines" (p.319). The 'Faces of Meth' campaign can thus be seen as a cite of "punitive consumption," which "transforms the pain and humiliation of drug use and imprisonment into titillating commodities and markets a penalty of crude instruction" (p. 321), while reifying cultural stereotypes about race and drug use. Imagery of addiction in the current cultural context, however is not always presented through punitive frames that can be incorporated into a penal regime. Recent documentaries and reality TV series dealing with addiction and recovery such as *Intervention*, *Recovery Boys*, and *Heroin(e)*, and *Oxyana*, in fact divert the punitive gaze, opting for a softer, more compassionate tone that frames addiction as a public health problem rather than a criminal problem. The imagery of addiction and overdose, particularly when it focuses on white

middle-class subjects, are therefore more often consumed as “humanitarian spectacles” rather than as “punitive spectacles.” Reflection on the biopolitics (Foucault, 1976) of addiction, bares insight into how social discourses and accompanying visuals can lead to the subjectivation of bodies into opposing frameworks. One frame treats addiction as a disease that must be cured through biomedical interventions and treats addicts with compassion and sympathy. The more conventional frame applied consistently throughout the war on drugs, treats addiction as a criminal issue, as a grave social ill, that should be dealt with punitively. More often than not these binary frames line up along race and class divisions. For example, addiction in a wealthy or middle-class white family is likely to elicit a humanitarian response, while addiction in poor black or Latinx family in the inner city is likely to be judged punitively

The differential ‘values’ conferred to bodies through the viral spread of overdose imagery requires interrogation of how spectacles are incorporated into a ‘neoliberal’ logic. This can be approached by using Guy Debord’s (1967) notion of “society of the spectacle.” The spectacle, according to this conception achieves a capitalist function of “pacification and depoliticization” – such that social subjects become passively estranged from their own creative labor—what Debord (1967) calls a “permanent opium war.” In traditional media, like television, the act of “submissively watching” creates value for the elite owners and the advertisers that subsidize their operations. The spectacle, thus sublimates primal human drives into passive capitalist consumption, alienating the subject from his or her ‘natural’ relationship to labor. Cultural production in the networked information society, can from one perspective be seen as following a similar capitalist logic, or what Kellner has called “technocapitalism.” As Kellner (2003) claims:



...the synthesis of global corporate capitalism, and information and entertainment technologies is constructing novel forms of society and culture, controlled by capital and with global reach. In this context the concept of the networked infotainment society characterizes the emergent technocapitalist in order to highlight the imbrications of information and entertainment in the wired and wireless multimedia and information/entertainment technologies of the present. (p. 14)

In this conception, cultural production in the networked context only amplifies the capitalist “technospectacle” by “escalating the information and multimedia extravaganzas into the home and workplace through the Internet” (Kellner, 2003, p.14). Mihailidis & Viotty’s (2017) concept of “spreadable spectacle” expand on the frameworks advanced by Dubord and Kellner, to describe how in digital culture, citizens can drive, sustain, and amplify distorted and spectacularized narratives about reality.

Serious interrogation of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural commodities in the information society, however, requires further consideration of how value is exchanged in networked contexts. Instead of passivity and pacification, social networks prosper from user motivation to participate and share, which requires activation of ‘affective’ drives and motivations from the user. Given the rapid advancements in digital technology, and concomitantly, digital representation, it is necessary to give due recognition to emergent “participatory” practices in the production of culture. Porter, for example shows how the rise of Web 2.0 requires the recognition of a “broader sense of value” –one that beyond just exchange of money for commodities, to include a model “based on desire, participation, sharing, emotional connectedness” (176). Similarly, for Dean (2010) value in a Web 2.0 context is accrued by harnessing human emotional labor, or “affective drives,” which often propels users to share and circulate words and images across digital networks. For Dean (2010), the impulse for enjoyment is a primary driver in the circulation of digital texts and images. “Every little tweet or comment, every forwarded image or petition,” according to

Dean (2010) “accrues a tiny affective nugget, a little surplus enjoyment, a smidgen of attention that attaches to it” (p. 95). In Dean’s (2010) radical modification of historical materialism the labor of circulation produces ‘communicative capital’ from both the use and exchange of affective ‘energies.’

The broader sense of value afforded through Dean’s (2010) concept of communicative capital demonstrates how value can be accrued through a share, like, tweet, or search. In the information/network society, views, clicks, searches, shares are commoditized—digital transactions that translate into a “commodity” responsible for creating the vast wealth accrued by big data giants. Google and Facebook, for example have built their business empires by leveraging the emotional labor of users. The impulse to share, to like, to comment can originate from users’ affective drive to generate symbolic value—a drive that generates real material value for the content host (Facebook, Twitter, Google).

The business models of news websites and content viewing platforms like YouTube are dependent on user engagement, and engagement has been shown to be highest for stories that elicit strong emotional reactions. In particular researchers have also found positive associations between content virility and the emotions of anger, awe, and anxiety, and a negative relationship between virility and the emotion of sadness (Berger & Milkman 2012; Hiembach & Hinz 2016). A similar conclusion was drawn from a study of millions of messages posted on Sina Weibo, a Twitter-like micoblogging platform in China. Researchers found that the emotion of joy spread faster than sadness, but it was posts that evoked anger that spread the quickest and widest (Fan et al, 2014). Incendiary and fear-inducing tweets, posts, and videos, (what has become popularly known as “outrage porn”) are therefore more likely to turn into viral spectacles. Under these conditions, YouTube’s algorithims that tap

into “deep neural networks” to recommend content to viewers have been shown to amplify fringe and extremist content—in particular an “Alt-Right filter bubble” (Kaiser and Rauchfleisch, 2018). More extreme stories are therefore likely to generate more user interactions and more time spent on the site, which translates into more ad revenue for the company.

When value is extracted from “outrage porn” that harnesses visceral emotionality, like a viral overdose video, a critical examination of the commoditization of trauma is required. As many overdose sufferers are not aware that their lowest moments are being recorded and disseminated, and as victims of fatal overdoses have no control of how their image is appropriated and used postmortem, there is serious potential for economic and interpersonal exploitation. Under these conditions, the affective drives of users combined with trained algorithms can facilitate the spread of overdose spectacles, which can then be packaged, and commoditized by content hosts. The visceral attraction to these spectacles can produce real economic value when eyes are diverted to advertisements. To illustrate, the screenshot below, from the celebrity gossip site, USmagazine.com, shows the now infamous image of an unconscious Mandy McGowan, side by side with an advertisement for a T-shirt.

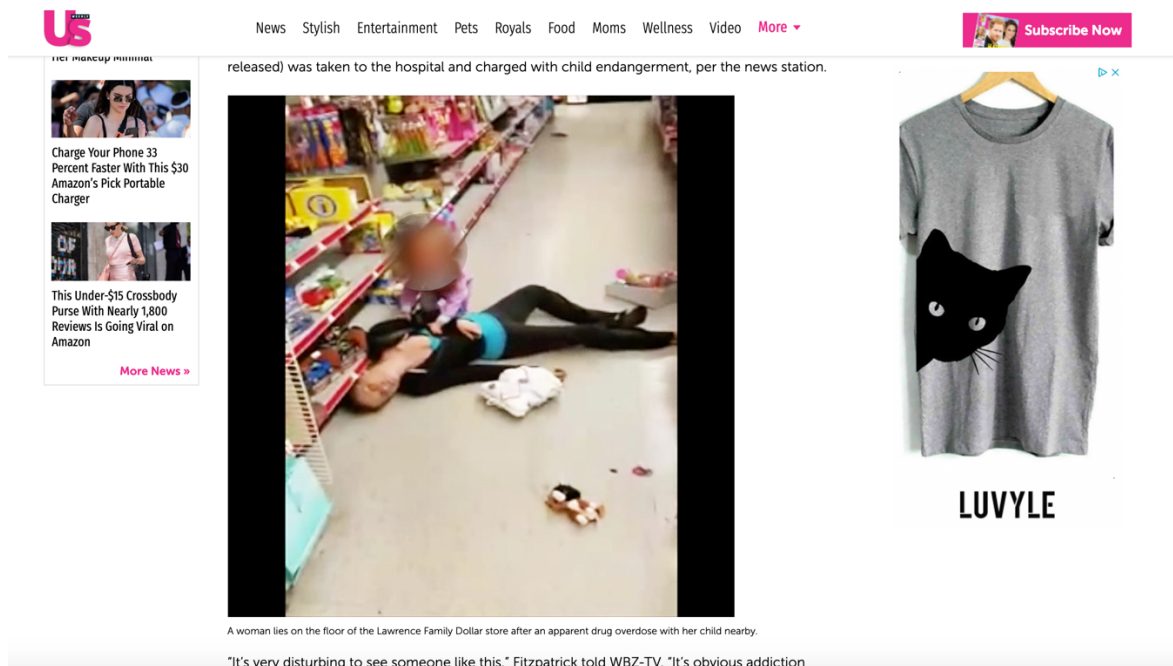


Figure 19: Screenshot from USmagazine.com story about the Mandy McGowan overdose

There is also potential symbolic exploitation through further stigmatization of addiction and overdose. Overdose survivors and families grieving from a loved one lost to overdose often experience stigma, including labeling, stereotyping and an ‘us versus them’ mentality from others (Templeton et al 2016; Walter et al 2015). According to Templeton (2016) the experiences of stigma are often amplified by “...the response of others, particularly officials, and the approach taken by the media in their reporting” (p.63). News headlines often feature sensational language that further the stigmatization felt by individuals, and communities. As Templeton’s (2016) interviews with families of overdose victims found:

Two parents repeated newspaper headlines they read about their sons – “Drug Addict Dies in Supermarket Car Park” and “Unemployed Man Dies of Drug Overdose”. In the former case the family complained to the local newspaper and received an apology. In the latter case, the father wrote to the editor but received no response. (p.63)

Many scholars researching dying and bereavement have advocated for including overdose fatalities in the category of “special deaths” (Walter et al. 2015; Guy and Holloway,

2010; Templeton et al., 2016), which typically involve a death of a child or suicide and result in “a high level of trauma” that is, “socially stigmatizing or existentially problematic” (Guy and Holloway, 2010, p. 84) The grief is also often “disenfranchised.” (Doka, 2001). Disenfranchised grief” can be defined as “the grief incurred a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported” (Doka, 1999, p. 37). As Doka (1999) claims, “...it can be much more difficult to mourn, and reactions are often complicated. It is important to recognize and try to meet the needs of those whose grief is not acknowledge by society, whatever the emotional or financial costs” (p. 37). In many cases the stigmatization and trauma of an opioid addiction can destroy the ontological security (Giddins, 1991) of a family. But what happens when a near death or death resulting from an opioid overdose is thrust into the spotlight, transmitted widely through media circuits, and opened up for public view and consumption? With the rise of viral media, the expansion of visual culture, and greater availability of images and discourses related to the effects of opioid use, including death, the impacts of the opioid crisis including the disenfranchised grief of individuals and families are increasingly on display. This chapter attempts to chart the various discourses that are produced and amplified through the viral distribution and consumption of images related to opioid overdose. The production and transmission of these images, simultaneously, are considered within the geographical and socio-political context of the Merrimack Valley—though their reach often extends far beyond.

A contextual analysis of the intersections between racial and socioeconomic factors is also necessary, as the current crisis in the Merrimack Valley cannot be disentangled from long histories of tensions between races and social classes in the region. Given that the current crisis in the Merrimack Valley is enmeshed with histories of racial and class tensions,

this research is particularly invested in understanding how ‘disenfranchised grief’ is viewed, represented, and employed discursively across different levels of privilege. This chapter, thus attempts to answer several related questions: How is disenfranchised grief viewed, represented and employed discursively when the victim is racially and socioeconomically *disenfranchised*? Conversely, how is disenfranchised grief viewed, represented and employed discursively when the victim is racially and socioeconomically privileged? What raced and classed discourses emerge through the digital circulation of imagery around overdose? How does the subject position of the victim, including race, class and gender, influence affective responses to the images/discourses? Finally, how are the discourses/imagery of overdose influenced by the unique racial, political, geographical, and socioeconomic configurations of the Merrimack Valley?

While past literature has focused on society’s affective responses to overdoses (Walter et al. 2015; Guy and Holloway, 2010, Templeton et al 2016), few studies, if any, have looked at how these affective responses are influenced by the race, class, and gender of the victim. Few studies have also examined media representations of overdose. McLean (2017) examined Newspaper representations of overdose fatalities in southwestern Pennsylvania between 1988 and 2014, finding that stories increasingly presented overdose sufferers as “unexpected” opioid users, while privileging “biomedical discourses of addiction” to convey the “impropriety of punitive responses to drug misuse” (p.411). Goodman (2019) meanwhile invited heroin users in Vancouver, B.C to engage in digital storytelling workshops to share personal narratives that “disrupt hegemonic representations” and promote “compassionate and science-based treatments for chronic addiction” (p.75). Cherian et al (2018) performed a content analysis of representations of codeine misuse on Instagram and found that popular

cultural imagery on the social media site increasingly normalizes recreational use of codeine. These studies provide compelling pictures about media representations of opioid abuse and overdose, but further understanding is needed of the visual culture around overdose.

### **3. Moral Panics and Visual Criminology**

In light of these realities, and in context of the insights provided by Stuart Hall and contemporary circulation scholars this study also asks: How do images and news spectacles linked to the opioid crisis in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, circulate across the digital sphere, and what discourses are produced as a result? What roles do the police, lawmakers, and the media play in (re)producing, circulating, and amplifying moral panics around the opioid crisis within the geopolitical specificities of New Hampshire and Massachusetts? How is the race and class of users and dealers symbolically constructed through the circulation and amplification of the images and discourses? This study attempts to map out the complex interplay between the news media, law enforcement, and policymakers in producing, circulating, amplifying, and sustaining public anxiety about the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley and beyond. To analyze this complex process, this study employs evaluative tools that account for how images and texts are transformed by the various actors and technologies they encounter in circulation, and the new discursive forms that emerge as a result of these interactions.

We can also extend on Cohen's (1972) and Hall et al.'s (1978) work on amplification of deviance in the production of moral panics and folk devils, to describe how in networked/online culture, the audience/readers, and the text itself, become active agents in the circulation and amplification of public threats and social anxieties. It is argued here that symbolic process of generating 'moral panics' has stayed consistent with Cohen's (1972) and

Hall et al.'s (1978) early conceptualization of the phrase, but the manner in which representations of crime and deviance are circulated and amplified has been transformed through a dynamic interplay between human and nonhuman actors. This posthumanist, “new materialist” approach to understanding circulation follows Gries’ (2013) concept (which she borrows from Bruno Latour) of ‘rhetorical actancy’, or the dynamic process by which, “...humans are transformed by the relation they enter into with nonhumans just as nonhumans are transformed by the relations they enter into with humans” (p. 80). To illustrate, the capacity for citizens to capture acts of crime and deviancy on camera phones, has not only transformed the manner in which representations of criminality are produced, circulated, and consumed, but also the crimes themselves. In some instances, criminal acts have been perpetrated solely as a spectacle to be captured, circulated and consumed through social media outlets such as YouTube and Facebook—a new phenomenon that Yar (2012) has termed, “will-to representation.” One example is “Happy Slapping” – a social media craze originating in the UK, in which a victim is attacked for the sole purpose of recording the assault on a camera phone. The circulation of these representations through social media and subsequent amplification by widespread mainstream media reporting of “Happy Slapping” incidents, contributed to a moral panic about senseless youth violence in the U.K, and even resulted in legislation criminalizing such behavior (Yar, 2012). The “Happy Slapping” phenomenon and similar viral spectacle are organized by a new logic of ‘amplification’ and circulation that transform how moral panics are produced and consumed (DeVoss and Ridolfo, 2009; Porter and DeVoss, 2006; Gries, 2013; Trimbur, 2000).

When overdose videos and similarly shocking incidents are recorded on phones and subsequently disseminated through social media, as well as through traditional media



channels, it can generate strong affective responses from users, including sympathy, anger, shock, fear, and moral panic. The strong affective responses to these spectacles arguably activate primal drives that propel their circulation, possibly explaining the viral spread of overdose photos and videos. I refer to these spectacles as, “overdose porn.” In their production, circulation, and consumption, the user becomes an active spectator, complicit in the objectification of the subject, who may be for used for voyeuristic “enjoyment.”

Similarly, in a *New York Times* column, viral overdose videos were referred to as a “new genre of American horror film” (Seelye et al. 2018, Dec 18). The reasons for posting, viewing, and sharing these videos, however, are often far from nefarious—and always complex. Sometimes they are posted and shared to generate awareness, sometimes to generate sympathy, sometimes to ridicule, and sometimes to promote a societal or political change .

The novel ways in which audiences are engaging with and deriving value from the spectacle of overdose requires critical reexaminations of standard approaches to understanding representations of crime, death and deviance. Some scholars (Hayward, 2010; Carabine, 2012) have proposed a new framework called ‘Critical Visual Criminology’—an ontological approach to understanding the imagery of crime and punishment that is capable of “encompassing meaning, affect, situation, symbolic power and efficiency, and the spectacle in the same “frame”” (p. 3). Crime and punishment have always been packaged for public view and consumption—over the ages, corporal punishment (the stocks, tar and feathering), public executions (the gallows, public hangings) and forms of criminological documentation (mug shots, courtroom sketches) have produced mythical imaginations of the abject ‘criminal’ body (Carrabine, 2012). These performances and visual displays are packed

with symbolic power, that is meant to arouse strong punitive views from audiences. With the proliferation of mobile phones equipped with photo and video technology and the advent of mobile applications like Snapchat and Instagram that allow easy uploading, sharing, and viewing of imagery, however, spectacles of criminality are being produced and consumed in novel ways. As Carrabine (2012) notes:

Over the last decade or so, criminologists have become increasingly concerned with the visual—as images of crime, harm and punishment proliferate across new and old media, there is a growing recognition that criminology needs to rethink its relations with the ascendant power of spectacle (p.463)

The explosion of images and representations of crime spread across what Appadurai (1996) has called the *Mediascape*, has simultaneously transformed the sociological imagination of criminality. One possible outcome of the exponential proliferation and intensifying spectacularization of criminological imagery, is the growth of what Linneman and Wall (2019) call “punitive voyeurism.” This penal frame for spectating provokes, “troubling contemporary cultural, political, and economic anxieties (p. 328), which recalls cultural and sociological conceptions of moral panic and deviancy amplification (Hall et al., 1978, Cohen, 1972). With the increasing distillation of abject criminal bodies into discreet representative forms that can be reproduced, shared, and spread virally, there are new potentialities for rapid proliferation and amplification of perceived threats. As Linneman and Wall (2019) concluded from their analysis of ‘Faces of Meth,’” these ‘faces’ marked by decaying *white* flesh, provide penal spectators very specific photographic evidence of the criminality lurking in their ‘community’—threatening its stability. (p. 324 2013). Linneman and Wall (2019), however, do not account for the full range of possible affective responses. While fear and moral panic may be common reactions to photographic representations of

drug use and its effects, audiences may also experience contrasting emotions such as sympathy and compassion.

It is proposed here that the location and circumstances of the overdose, the gender, the age, race, and class of the subject can shape both the representational strategies of content producers as well as the affective reactions from spectators. When an overdose enters the field of representation, the differential value society has conferred to bodies based on race, class, and gender, it is argued can result in either abjection on one end and exaltation on the other. It can also lead to either the accrument or diminishment of “communicative capital,” which in turn determines its ‘value’ within ‘affective’ networks. The overdose of a young suburban white woman from New Hampshire, for example, will produce a range of discourses that are very different than the fatal drugging and rape of a black child in Lawrence, Massachusetts. All of this can help to explain why visual representations of Mandy McGowan’s overdose experienced wide circulated and amplification. The narrative of a young white mother from New Hampshire, falling victim to opioid addiction, leading to criminal neglect of a child is certain to stir affective energies, which then drive its circulation through what Dean (2010) has called ‘affective networks’. It can also help to explain why Courtney Griffin’s fatal overdose could be used to precipitate significant reforms to drug policy. Dean’s (2014) theory thus provide a useful framework for understanding how affect is accrued differentially depending on the class and race of the body being represented in image and discourse. Data collected in this study, albeit a limited sample, suggests that images and discourses can evoke different affective energies when the user or dealer occupies a white, middle class body versus a poor, black or brown body. Although it is impossible to fully comprehend the full range of audiences’ affective responses, rhetorical

analysis of the images and discourses can reveal how emotion is used to produce affective ‘value’ in the cases of Mandy McGowan, Precious Wallaces, and Courtney Griffin.

Although much of the rhetoric associated with McGowan’s overdose revolved around drug investigations, it was found that the circulation of images and discourses related to the incident, brought to the fore, underlying anxieties about the growing opioid crisis in New Hampshire, New England and in United States in general. Rather than generating important policy debates, it created a platform for the judiciary, media, and police to amplify the threat of opioid addiction to the public. User commentary also suggests that the most common affective reactions expressed was scorn for the individuals filming the overdose, rather than for McGowan herself. The image of Courtney Griffin, it was found, was often used for memorializing her short life and for promoting more humane and non-punitive approaches to treating addiction. The image of Precious Wallace on the other hand rarely performed a memorializing function, and instead was used to promote more punitive views on prosecuting fentanyl and opioid users and dealers. The race and class of the overdose sufferer in each case, likely has a significant impact on reception. Although it is not possible to make conclusive links between race, class, and audience responses, there is substantial qualitative evidence to support that idea that views are more sympathetic and less punitive when the overdose sufferer is white.

## **B. Methodology**

This study applies combines a new materialist approach to visual rhetoric (Gries, 2015) with Hall et al.s (1978) concept of conjunctural analysis outlined in *Policing the Crisis* to examine the circulation and amplification of moral panics about the opioid crisis in New

Hampshire and Massachusetts. Gries (2015) makes the case for a “visual rhetoric” that treats images, not as stable, fixed objects, but as inert, transient forms that gain new meanings and consequentialities through their circulation and re-appropriation across time and space. To account for an image’s shifting rhetoricity, Gries (2015) advocates for a new materialist approach, which considers “...an image’s collective experience after it is initially produced and begins to circulate” (p. 338).

This study reframes the new materialist approach through Hall et al.’s (1978) older concept of conjunctural analysis. Hall’s use of conjunctural analysis is influenced by Althusserian and Gramscian notions about how ideology and ‘common sense’ emerge through complex articulations between base and superstructure. Based on this concept, Hall et al. (1978) show how the culture of ‘mugging’ and related discourses emerged as a reaction to specific material transformations in post-war British society. Through a systematic analysis of discourses in circulation Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate that the ‘mugger’ stands in for deeper anxieties about material conditions unfolding on the ground, including complex interactions between race, class and English identity.

Although Hall et al. (1978) never lays out a comprehensive methodological framework for conjunctural analysis, it provides useful context for understanding how the particularities of cultural forms in circulation can be analyzed to make broader connections to material conditions and it is argued here that Hall et al.’s (1978) notion of ‘conjunctures’ is commensurable with complexity and chaos theories that underline the new materialist approach. This study attempts to analyze how texts transform through complex interactions, with not only various authors, artists, and remixers in a digital network, but also with material conditions of inequality associated with race and class.

Drawing from this principle, this study applies a modified version of Gries' (2015) iconographic tracking methodology for charting the paths of circulation, re-appropriation and reproduction that an image follows, and the significations that arise through its various iterations across space and time. Iconographic tracking is an innovative research method that combines qualitative strategies and digital tools to trace an image's circulation, and iterative transformation, and impact. According to Gries (2015) iconographic tracking serves two functions: "...a) follow the multiple transformations that an image undergoes during circulation and b) identify the complex consequentiality that emerges from its divergent encounters" (p. 337). Iconographic tracking uses basic search engine tools such as Google and TinEye that are enabled with reverse image search capabilities to allow the researcher to locate photographic reproductions of the image and closely iterative images, and to be directed to websites and blogs they are embedded in. Once images are selected for analysis, they are saved in desktop files and then dragged into the reverse image search tool to show all closely iterative images. These images can then be saved for later micro-level qualitative analysis of the discourse linked to each iteration, and uses, rich evaluation of the rhetorical "consequentialities" as the image travels across multiple digital contexts.

Using basic image search and data retrieval methods, including reverse image search, Gries (2015) for example, was able to show how Sheppard Fairey's Obama Hope poster, through its digital circulation, and subsequent remixing was transformed to generate new meanings through differential appropriations by various audiences. After its initial production and circulation in early 2008 as a campaign poster meant to appeal to young voters, thousands of iterations and modifications of the image can be found in over 2,000,000

websites (Gries, 2015). Each of the images within its digital context serves unique political and social functions, often with purpose of subverting the author's original intentions.

Using Gries' (2015) Obama Hope example as a model, this study applies iconographic tracking methodology and Hall's model of conjunctural analysis to follow the circulation of images portraying prominent overdose cases in the Merrimack Valley region of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The first image is a still from a video shot inside a dollar store in Lawrence Massachusetts, showing a woman identified as Mandy McGowan, passed out from an apparent opioid overdose, as her 2-year-old daughter tugs at her arm and sobs uncontrollably. The heartbreaking video gained instant infamy and was widely circulated on news outlets and social media sites and was also featured on many law enforcement pages as a public safety warning. McGowan came to be known as the "Dollar Store Junkie" Being one of the most visible and most widely circulated representation of the opioid crisis, it is important to understand how the image, in its various iterations, after its initial production, are re-appropriated, reproduced, and recirculated—and the various discourses that are attached to it in the process. The second image features Courtney Griffin, who became a symbol for overdose awareness and advocacy. The third image, Precious Wallace, who tragically died after being drugged with Fentanyl by her great uncle. In order to chart the series of web contexts in which the images have been embedded into, the photos were dragged into Google's reverse image search function. This visual search query produces a content-based image retrieval, allowing for location of all web contexts in which the same image or similar images appear.

After performing iconographic searches for all of the images, headlines for stories containing the photos were collected, logged, and categorized. The headlines were then

imported into the open access software, Parallel Dots to analyze sentiment and emotion. The software uses Deep Learning powered algorithms to identify the sentiment of discrete bodies of text according to the classifications of negative, neutral or positive. This allows the researcher to identify overall tonal patterns exhibited in the language of the headlines. According the Parallel Dots website the function performs a, “.... very accurate analysis of the overall emotion of the text content incorporated from sources like Blogs, Articles, forums, consumer reviews, surveys, twitter etc. Sentiment analysis is most “widely applied to reviews and social media for a variety of applications, ranging from marketing to customer service...” but also has useful applications for academic inquiries of affective qualities exhibited in discrete text (Parallel Dots)

The sentiment analysis function, however only tests for *overall* affective tone and does not provide contextual information about the specific emotion embedded in the text. This is where Parallel Dots’ emotion analysis software comes to use. The software uses trained algorithms to recognize the emotions of Happy, Sad, Angry Fearful or Excited or Bored in text. As the Parallel Dots website explains...

Sometimes the three classes of sentiment (positive, negative and neutral) are not sufficient to understand the nuances regarding the underlying tone of a sentence. Our Emotion Analysis classifier is trained on our proprietary dataset and tells whether the underlying emotion behind a message is: Happy, Sad, Angry, Fearful, Excited or Bored (Emotion Analysis, n.d).

Both sentiment and emotion recognition tools use algorithms to assess confidence scores as percentages. The sentiment analysis tool assesses a percentage out of 100 total for each of the three items (negative, neutral, and positive). For example, a query may result in confidence scores of 50% for negative, 25% for neutral and 25% for positive for a total of 100%.



Analysis of sentiment and emotion through artificial intelligence is a developing practice and the tools are still not perfect. Therefore, there are limitations of the software, including its inability, at times, to detect the subtleties, nuances, and contextual cues that are embedded in the English language. The emotion in a text may also not fit into the six categories of Happy, Sad, Angry Fearful or Excited or Bored. Additional heuristic, interpretive, and contextual analyses are therefore required to arrive at a more complete of understanding of text. Critical cultural and discourse analyses are also employed to address how location class, race, and gender are expressed through imagery and language.

### **C. Results**

#### **1. Mandy McGowan**

The first image in discussion (figure 14) is a screenshot of a video taken of Mandy McGowan as she lay unconscious on the floor of Lawrence, MA Family Dollar store. The websites and social media platforms featuring the thumbnail image and the video it was taken from have given no attribution to an author, so its circulation is only loosely linked to its production as a cultural artefact—and thus linked much more directly a process of horizontal sharing and distribution across digital networks. Through its circulation, the image was found to undergo observable transformations, with different cropping and filter effects applied. The various incarnations of the image were circulated on social networking sites such as Facebook and local, national and international Internet news outlets. Borrowing from Gries (2015) iconographic tracking methodology, this section attempts to chart the circulation of this image in its various iterations across different digital media platforms and the discourses that are attached to it.

First, however important background information must be provided to give fuller context to the image and its widespread circulation across multiple platforms. Mandy McGowan is from Salem, New Hampshire, a predominantly white suburban community in the Merrimack Valley, just north of the Massachusetts line. Prior to the recording, McGowan had snorted Fentanyl at her home, and then travelled to the “sanctuary city” of Lawrence, Massachusetts. As a *New York Times* story reports,

On Sept. 18, 2016, a friend came to Ms. McGowan’s house in Salem, N.H., and offered her a hit of fentanyl, a deadly synthetic painkiller 50 times more potent than heroin. They sniffed a line and drove to the Family Dollar across the state line in Lawrence, where Ms. McGowan collapsed with her daughter beside her. At least two people in the store recorded the scene on their cellphones.

Two days later the video was released by the North Andover, Massachusetts based *Eagle-Tribune*, and was also published by the Lawrence police department. The original posting on the Eagle-Tribune website was accompanied with the following note from the Managing Editor, Tracey Ruah.

We recognize this video will be disturbing to readers. That's why we had lengthy discussions in our newsroom concerning whether we should publish it, or use the name of the apparent overdose victim seen in the footage.

The video was taken by an employee at a local dollar store. We published this footage because we believe it illustrates what police say they witness every day -- the human side of the opiate crisis – and the real impact on victims, their loved ones, law enforcement officials, firefighters, paramedics, and our society at large.

The video shows a woman collapsed on the floor of a Lawrence Dollar Store from an apparent overdose. Her 2-year-old daughter cries and tries to wake her. Bystanders call an ambulance and paramedics arrive. The woman is revived by naloxone, also known by its brand name, Narcan, a drug that reverses the effect of opiate overdoses.

We hope this video prompts discussion and spurs people to take action against the opiate scourge that has ravaged our region.

Hence, there were strong editorial concerns about the impact of the video, but ultimately the *Eagle Tribune* made the decision to publish it with the intent of stimulating discussion and bring awareness to the “opiate scourge” ravaging the region. After its initial publication the video was posted on the Lawrence, Massachusetts police department’s social media page and subsequently picked up by local TV networks, and cable news such as CNN and Fox, and widely circulated across the web. The video was featured on several amateur YouTube channels, as well as channels hosted by reputed news agencies such as CNN, CBS, and RT—each viewed thousands of times. The thumbnail image showing McGowan unconscious on the floor of the Lawrence, MA Family Dollar as her desperate young daughter attempts to revive her, was featured on hundreds of regional and national news websites as well general interest websites, based both in the U.S and internationally. These including the [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), [www.insideedition.com](http://www.insideedition.com), [www.wcvb.com](http://www.wcvb.com) (Boston-based ABC network affiliate), [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk), [www.gloucestertimes.com](http://www.gloucestertimes.com) (Gloucester, Massachusetts-based newspaper), [www.usmagazine.com](http://www.usmagazine.com) [www.boston.cbslocal.com](http://www.boston.cbslocal.com), [www.cnhinews.com](http://www.cnhinews.com) (Indiana-based news website), [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), [www.huffingtonpost.ca](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca), [www.dailyindependent.com](http://www.dailyindependent.com) (Kentucky-based news website), [www.cleburnetimesreview.com](http://www.cleburnetimesreview.com) (Texas-based news website), [www.times-news.com](http://www.times-news.com) (news website serving West Virginia and Maryland), [www.meadvilletribune.com](http://www.meadvilletribune.com) (Pennsylvania-based news website), [www.record-eagle.com](http://www.record-eagle.com) (Michigan-based news website), [www.tribdem.com](http://www.tribdem.com) (Pennsylvania-based news website), [www.joplinglobe.com](http://www.joplinglobe.com) (Missouri-based news website), [www.athensreview.com](http://www.athensreview.com) (Texas-based news website), [www.palestineherald.com](http://www.palestineherald.com) (Texas-based news website), [www.eagletribune.com](http://www.eagletribune.com) (North Andover, Massachusetts-based news website where the video

was originally posted), [www.themercury.com](http://www.themercury.com) (Kansas-based news website), [www.news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au) (Australia-based news website), [www.theaustralian.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.com.au) (Australia-based news website), [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk) (UK-based news website), [www.Boston25news.com](http://www.Boston25news.com), [www.turtleboysports.com](http://www.turtleboysports.com) (Massachusetts-based sports, news and culture website), [www.heroviral.com](http://www.heroviral.com) (viral news website), [www.kiro7.com](http://www.kiro7.com) (Washington state-based news website), [www.WXYZ.com](http://www.WXYZ.com) (Michigan-based news website), [www.flyheight.com](http://www.flyheight.com) (viral video website), [www.opposingviews.com](http://www.opposingviews.com) (politics, culture, and international affairs website), [www.colorandlight.blog](http://www.colorandlight.blog) (Christian blog) [www.jeumpanews.com](http://www.jeumpanews.com) (Indonesia-based news website). Other visually similar images were found on [www.globalnews.ca](http://www.globalnews.ca) (Canada-based news website), [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) (fact-checking website), [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com) (India-based website), [www.news.yahoo.com](http://www.news.yahoo.com), and [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com). The video was also featured on the Facebook pages, such as NECN (New England Cable News), drawing over 100,000 views, close to 600 comments, and more than 350 shares.

Table 4: Internet news headlines from the Mandy McGowan story with source, sentiment and emotion

Headline	Source	Sentiment (%)
		Emotion (%)
<i>Mother captured in 'heartbreaking' overdose video charged with child endangerment</i>	Washington Post	Positive 38.3 Neutral 18.8 <b>Negative 42.9</b> <b>Sad: 73.9</b>
<i>Mom Who Overdosed in Store Next to Her 2-Year-Old in Viral Video Speaks Out</i>	Inside edition	Positive 18, <b>Neutral 61.9</b> Negative 20 <b>Fear: 36.2</b>

<i>'Heartbreaking' video captures toddler trying to wake mother after apparent overdose</i>	Washington Post	Positive 32.7 Neutral 11 <b>Negative 56.3</b> <b>Sad: 63.08</b>
<i>How Do You Recover After Millions Have Watched You Overdose?</i>	New York Times	Positive 4, <b>Neutral 50.7</b> Negative 45.4 <b>Sad: 35.92</b>
<i>Toddler tries desperately to wake mother who collapsed in store</i>	Washington Post	Positive 2.2 Neutral 14.7 <b>Negative 83.1</b> <b>Sad: 25.85</b>
<i>US police release footage of toddler trying to wake mother after apparent overdose: 'It's heartbreaking to see a child in that situation'</i>	The Independent (UK)	Positive 5.4 Neutral 4 <b>Negative 90.6</b> <b>Sad: 65.56</b>
<i>A tot's anguish: Video captures mom's apparent overdose at Family Dollar store</i>	Gloucester Times	Positive 25.4 <b>Neutral 57.4</b> Negative 17.1 <b>Fear: 28.27</b>
<i>Mom Who Appeared to OD on Camera Faces Judge</i>	New England Cable News	Positive 35.2 Neutral 28.5 <b>Negative 36.4</b> <b>Fear: 28.42</b>
<i>Viewers Outraged After Video Shows Toddler Standing Over Mother Who Appeared to Have Overdosed in Lawrence, Massachusetts</i>	New England Cable News	Positive 10.9 Neutral 33.2 <b>Negative 55.9</b> <b>Angry: 31.4</b>
<i>Heartbreaking Video Shows Toddler Trying To Revive Unconscious Mom On Store Floor</i>	CBS Local Boston	Positive 37.8 Neutral 16.8 <b>Negative 45.4</b> <b>Sad: 73.35</b>
<i>Toddler Cries at Unconscious Mom Who Collapsed From Apparent Heroin Overdose</i>	NBC News	Positive 13 Neutral 13.6 <b>Negative 73.4</b> <b>Sad: 54.64</b>
<i>Video Shows Child Trying To Wake Mom Who Allegedly Overdosed</i>	The Huffington Post	Positive 9.8 Neutral 32.5 <b>Negative 52</b> <b>Bored: 29.9</b>
<i>Mom who overdosed in Mass. store with toddler by her side to face endangerment charge</i>	The Tribune Democrat	Positive 27.8 Neutral 24.1 <b>Negative 48.1</b> <b>Angry: 33.38</b>

<i>Mom Who Overdosed In Front Of Daughter Admits She Hit Rock Bottom</i>	CBS Boston	Positive 30.2 Neutral 14.9 <b>Negative 55</b> <b>Fear: 29.29</b>
<i>Police plan to charge mother who overdosed in discount shop with two-year-old daughter by her side</i>	The Independent (UK)	Positive 7.4 <b>Neutral 53.6</b> Negative 39.1 <b>Fear: 23.4</b>
<i>Police will seek endangerment charge against mom in apparent overdose video</i>	The Eagle Tribune (North Andover, MA)	Positive 6.2 Neutral 46.7 <b>Negative 47.1</b> <b>Fear: 28.68</b>
<i>Video Of Crying Toddler Trying To Wake Mother From Apparent Overdose Is Devastating</i>	The Huffington Post Canada	Positive 4.3 Neutral 4.1 <b>Negative 91.6</b> <b>Sad: 75.64</b>
<i>A shocking overdose photo exposed her addiction — and may have saved her life</i>	The Washington Post	Positive 23.3 Neutral 23.7 <b>Negative 53</b> <b>Fear: 36.1</b>
<i>Epidemic of drug addicted parents sweeping the United States is tightening its grip</i>	www.news.com.au	Positive 17.6 Neutral 13.7 <b>Negative 68.7</b> <b>Fear: 31.5</b>
<i>Toddler cries after mother overdoses in store</i>	The Australian	Positive 14.5 Neutral 19.5 <b>Negative 66</b> <b>Sad: 56.5</b>
<i>Mother who was caught on video overdosing in front of her two-year-old daughter in Family Dollar store is charged with child endangerment</i>	The Daily Mail (UK)	Positive 15.9 Neutral 26.3 <b>Negative 57.8</b> <b>Fear: 32.78</b>
<i>Follow-Up: Family Dollar Overdose Mom Mandy McGowan Gets A Slap On The Wrist</i>	Turtle Boy Sports (Central Massachusetts)	<b>Positive 43.5</b> Neutral 21.8 Negative 34.8 <b>Excited: 40.75</b>
<i>Video shows mom overdosing in toy aisle</i>	KIRO 7 (Seattle)	<b>Positive 47</b> Neutral 41.2 Negative 11.7 <b>Fear: 32.31</b>
<i>How the opioid crisis is hurting a growing number of children &amp; babies</i>	WXYZ (Detroit)	Positive 21.5 Neutral 11.5 <b>Negative 66.9</b> <b>Sad: 46.2</b>

<i>WATCH: Massachusetts mom becomes unconscious after drug overdose; helpless toddler tries to wake her up</i>	India Express	Positive 6.6 Neutral 11.4 <b>Negative 82</b> <b>Fear: 29.96</b>
<i>A mom apparently overdoses next to her child and why police want you to watch</i>	CNN	Positive 7.8 Neutral 23.3 <b>Negative 68.9</b> <b>Sad: 25.2</b>
<i>Video shows mom who overdosed in store while toddler tries to wake her; woman charged</i>	Global News Canada	Positive 33.3 <b>Neutral 34.5</b> Negative 32.2 <b>Fear: 24.04</b>
<i>Mom overdoses inside store with toddler in Massachusetts</i>	Yahoo News	<b>Positive 40.5</b> Neutral 32.5 Negative 27 <b>Fear: 28.35</b>
<i>Mother Overdoses on Heroin at Store With Toddler</i>	Snopes	<b>Positive 34.6</b> Neutral 34 Negative 31.5 <b>Fear: 33.52</b>
<i>HEARTBREAKING: Crying toddler attempts to awaken her mother who OD'd in a Family Dollar store</i>	crimejunkie.com	Positive 19.9 Neutral 21.9 <b>Negative 58.1</b> <b>Sad: 77.77</b>
<i>Toddler Tries to Revive Mother From an Apparent Overdose at Family Dollar Store in Heartbreaking Video</i>	US Weekly	Positive 9.7 Neutral 34 <b>Negative 56.3</b> <b>Sad: 48.96</b>
<i>Toddler Wails, Tugs at Overdosing Mom in Dollar Store: Video</i>	Patch.com	Positive 13.2 <b>Neutral 80.1</b> Negative 6.7 <b>Fear: 30.2</b>

The video was also published on many YouTube channels, including both those of well-established news outlets and pop culture platforms. The video was featured on the international news services such as RT, national news services such as CBS News and CNN, infotainment programs such as *Inside Edition*, and *The Doctors*, local news services such as KTNV, WPLG and viral video sites such as TomoTV and Waechter Movie. The following titles were used to describe the videos found on YouTube:

Table 5: YouTube titles with channel, sentiment, and emotion

Title	Channel	Sentiment and Emotion (%)
<i>Watch: 2-year-old tries to revive overdosed mom</i>	CBS News	Positive 19.2 <b>Neutral 47.9</b> Negative 32.9 <b>Fear: 29.76</b>
<i>WARNING GRAPHIC CONTENT: Toddler Tries To Wake Up Junkie Mom After Overdosing</i>	Waechter Movie	Positive 10.4 Neutral 30 <b>Negative 59.6</b> <b>Fear: 34.94</b>
<i>2 year old Crying and Trying to Wake Mom from Overdose at Dollar Store</i>	Liberty Blue	Positive 9.4 Neutral 6.4 <b>Negative 84.2</b> <b>Fear: 26.43</b>
<i>Video shows mom apparently overdose beside toddler</i>	CNN	Positive 32. Neutral 29 <b>Negative 38.8</b> <b>Fear: 37.39</b>
<i>2-Year-Old Girl Tries To Wake Her Mom Who Passed Out From Drug Overdose: Cops</i>	Inside Edition	Positive 23.2 Neutral 18.4 <b>Negative 58.3</b> <b>Fear: 35.64</b>
<i>Video of mom overdosing in store</i>	KTNV	Positive 23.5 <b>Neutral 67.4</b> Negative 9.1 <b>Fear: 34.79</b>
<i>Mom overdoses on drugs in dollar store as toddler freaks out and tries to revive her</i>	TomoNews	Positive 17.9 Neutral 16.7 <b>Negative 63.3</b> <b>Fear: 33.73</b>
<i>Child screams as mom overdoses in store aisle</i>	WPLG	Positive 33.5 <b>Neutral 39.7</b> Negative 26.8 <b>Fear: 33.73</b>
<i>Video shows toddler tugging at mom who overdosed in store</i>	ABC 10 News	Positive 18.3 <b>Neutral 54.5</b> Negative 27.3 <b>Fear: 37.72</b>
<i>Toddler cries, shakes unconscious mother after suspected drug overdose in store</i>	KTNews	Positive 12.8 Neutral 21.5 <b>Negative 65.7</b> <b>Sad: 40.31</b>
<i>Mother overdoses inside store with 2-year-old</i>	Local 12	<b>Positive 46.5</b> Neutral 30.8 Negative 22.7 <b>Angry: 25.79</b>



<i>World Reaction to overdosed mother passed out in a Family Dollar store</i>	The Huffington Post	Positive 9.8 Neutral 32.5 <b>Negative 52</b> <b>Bored: 34.53</b>
<i>Toddler trying to revive unconscious mother after drug overdose (Distressing footage)</i>	RT	Positive 14.4 Neutral 38.8 <b>Negative 46.6</b> <b>Fear: 37.09</b>
<i>Overdose Caught on Tape</i>	The Doctors	Positive 15 Neutral 14.2 <b>Negative 70.8</b> <b>Fear: 49.82</b>

### **a. Circulation**

The shocking imagery of Mandy McGowan’s overdose was by far the most widely circulated out of the three cases in discussion. The story reached local, national and international headlines, and was featured prominently across print, television, and internet platforms.

Out of the 32 stories included in the analysis only 6 were local outlets covering the greater Boston/Southern New Hampshire region. Seven of the outlets are internationally based, in places as far as Australia and India. Three of the headlines came from national cable news services like NBC and CNN. The rest were either from websites, and regional and national news outlets outside of the Greater Boston/Southern New Hampshire market. Unlike the other cases, which appeared almost exclusively in reputable journalistic outlets, and small-time digital memorials, the McGowan story was also featured in pop culture and celebrity gossip publications. The image and the attached narratives were for example featured in the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* as well as *US Magazine* and *Inside Edition*—media outlets with markedly different readership and journalistic intents. The *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are reputable newspapers of record with storied histories of investigative reporting, while *US Weekly* and *Inside Edition* largely feature

celebrity gossip stories, fluff, and sensationalized infotainment. According to a pew research study, *The New York Times* readers tend to be wealthier (38% had an annual household income above \$75,000), highly educated, and politically liberal, 56% male and 44% female. Readers of US Weekly according to SRDS, a company that tracks information on various media, are predominantly female (80.2%), have a media age of 38.5, and are also wealthier (median household income of \$81,715) (US Weekly Reader Profile, 2018).. According to 2015 US census data the median household income in the US is \$56,516. Total 31,326 average of 1,566 total interaction.

How can we account for the image's adoption and circulation through varied media channels, to a broad range of audiences in diverse geographic spaces? The question may be approached through analysis of the affective qualities of the image and contextual cues found in discourses about location, race, class, and gender. The following sections address how affective value is expressed and accrued through the headlines, and intersects with discourses around race, place, gender, and class.

### **b. Accrual of Affect: Emotion and Sentiment Analysis**

Overall there were 32 headlines that were included in the analysis. All of the headlines were imported into the Parallel Dots software for 'sentiment' and 'emotion' analysis. By far the most common sentiment in the headlines was negative (n=22 or 68.75% of sample), followed by neutral (n=6 or 18.75%), and positive (n=4 or 12.5%). The most common emotion detected was fear (n=15, 46.87% of entire sample), followed by sad (n=13 or 40.62%), angry (n=2 or 6.25% and bored (n=1 or 3.12%) and excited (n=1 or 3.12%). There were no headlines that registered a predominant emotion of 'happy'.

For the YouTube descriptions there were similar results. In all there were fourteen YouTube video descriptions included in the analysis (n=14). The most common sentiment in the descriptions was negative (n=9 or 64.28% of sample), followed by neutral (n=4 or 28.57%) and positive (n=1 or 7.14%). The most common emotion detected was fear (n=11 or 78.57% of sample), followed by sad (n=1 or 7.14%), bored (n=1 or 7.14%), and angry (n=1 or 7.14%). There were no headlines that registered a predominant emotion of 'Happy', or 'Excited'.

Analysis of the headlines and YouTube titles thus show that the most common sentiment was negative, and the most common emotions were sadness and fear. This trend is confirmed through a simple review of the headlines and contents of articles. Many of the headlines feature strong subjective wording, with such emotive terms as 'shocking', 'devastating', 'anguish,' 'helpless' and 'heartbreaking' (used in seven separate headlines). These terms simultaneously elicit fear, shock, sadness, and sympathy, and anger which can trigger strong affective responses from audiences. The presence of hysterical young child certainly adds to the emotional impact of the incident. Could the strong evocation of *pathos* explain the widespread adoption and circulation of the story? Deeper rhetorical analysis of the content of articles reveals how reporters amplified aspects of visceral of the story.

A *Washington Post* article used the adjectives "terrified." "powerless" heart-wrenching" and "harrowing" to describe the incident caught on film:

A terrified toddler in pink-and-purple "Frozen" pajamas prodded, pulled and cried — but was powerless to wake up her mother.

Mandy McGowan, 36, was unconscious from an apparent opioid overdose, sprawled in the toy aisle of a Family Dollar store in Lawrence, Mass. Her 2-year-old daughter pulled McGowan's fingers, then sat down beside her and tried to shake her face.

The heart-wrenching moment was captured on video, and the footage went viral — another shocking scene from the opioid epidemic’s harrowing horror show.

In a *New York Times* article, the video was called “gut-wrenching” and also quotes Lawrence MA chief of James Fitzpatrick, who refers to the incident as “heartbreaking.” The *New York Times* feature also includes intimate details of McGowan’s life, personalizing her story, and bringing to focus possible explanations for her behavior. The article carries a sympathetic tone throughout, describing sexual molestation McGowan experienced as a child, and abusive relationships she went through as an adult. It also chronicles how she became addicted to opioids after she was prescribed OxyContin, Percocet and fentanyl patches while recovering from neck surgery. All of this helps to construct an emotional backstory leading up to the indignities witnessed in the dollar store. When the incident is seen as culminating from a life of abuse, the end result of unscrupulous prescription practices, much more sympathy can be generated for the victim.

Sadness/sympathy, however, as previous research has shown, are not as effective as anger/scorn in metastasizing digital content (Fan et al, 2014; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Hiembach & Hinz, 2016). Even though sadness and fear were the most common emotion detected in the headlines, the contents of articles and comments from users often struck a scornful tone—towards Mandy herself, towards the individuals who recorded the scene, and towards the media outlets that facilitated its viral circulation. For example, the *New York Times* article, through interviews and commentary amplify scornful views of the media spectacles produced by viral overdose videos and photos. As the *New York Times* headline asks rhetorically, *How Do You Recover After Millions Have Watched You Overdose?* Matt Ganem, the executive director of the treatment center, told the *New York Times*, “For

someone already dealing with her own demons, she now has to deal with public opinion, too...You're a spectacle. Everyone is watching." In many cases, the article points out, the gawking and public shaming, and the heightened shame and stigmatization resulting from these spectacles drive the user into a deeper spiral of addiction.

In other coverage of the story, scrutiny, anger, and blame were deflected away from the addicts themselves and towards the individuals who recorded the incident, as well as the media outlets that facilitated its widespread circulation. The anger is reflected in many comments from readers critical of the exploitative nature of recording and the media's willingness to publicize it. For instance, "The people watching and taking the video are witnessing a person in a death spiral and they do nothing. Have they no shame?." was the comment with the most user engagements on a *Washington Post* article. A review of top-rated comments on the YouTube videos of the overdose reveal similar patterns:

- WHY IS THE MAN NOT HELPING THE BABY AND THE MOM?!? this generation man 🙄
- this is so hear breaking....no one picked up that baby, or tried to help the baby, comfort her. so wrong
- How about maybe umm....helping!!?
- The real issue in this case is the camera and its operator
- We're blaming the camera man and not the crack head mom??? Logic really?? This is why women need to take drug test before child birth.
- these types of people should not be having kids.
- lmao nice
- COMFORT THE BABY PLEASE!!
- And the person with the camera just standing there stupid as can be.
- What is more disturbing, is that person filming, while watching that poor kid cry. Really?
- This is terrible
- The people filming called an ambulance before they started recording. Still someone could have comforted the poor child :(

There were hundreds of other similar angry comments with the same criticisms. In addition to shaming the individuals documenting the incident on their phones, other

commentators faulted the news outlets for releasing the video to the public. For example one commentator on Patch.com, a news aggregate site wrote,

The employee should be facing charges for not rendering aid! This constant bombardment of the airing of this video over and over and over again it DISGRACEFUL AND DISGUSTING and SHAME ON THE MEDIA!! ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Another commentator directly called out the *Eagle Tribune* for its coverage of the incident:

The Eagle Tribune why does your newspaper keep shaming the addicts? Do you realize you violated her HIPPA rights under the law by posting the video and naming her as she went through a medical issue? I pray she gets clean and sues your paper!!! ... the real shame of the video is no one helped. Instead they all stood there and video taped it. That's the real story, people today care more about videotaping it than actually helping. What kinda person can tape it and not console the child??? Clearly, one that your paper respects because without the video your rag of a paper has no story to exploit!!!

In some instances, the media outlets attempted to defend their decision to publish the video, and to commiserate with the ‘heartbroken’ spectators. This was the dominant theme in one editorial piece published by the *Gloucester Times*, with the headline, “*Our view: Video of toddler and overdosed mom broke our hearts, too*” (not included in the analysis since no image was present in the article). As the author opines:

The opiate epidemic sweeping the region is not easy to ignore. It is, however, possible for some people to keep a certain amount of emotional distance from it. To watch the video is uncomfortable, disturbing, grueling. Most of us want to hit pause or close our eyes....Did running the video amount to exploiting the victim? We asked ourselves this question, too. And our answers led to our decision to publish it. Some readers accused us of perpetuating the stigma and shame surrounding drug addiction. We think showing this video accomplishes the opposite. Stigma and shame thrive in secrecy. Publishing the video brought it out in the open. Through all of the outrage the footage provoked, the opiate crisis is illuminated. A mother unconscious on the Dollar Store floor. A 2-year-old desperately trying to wake her up. Our hearts broke, too. Not only for this one little girl, but for all the collateral damage and carnage of this war. This newspaper is proud to take a lead role in combating this opiate scourge. We will continue our reports with news that will enlighten, disturb, create conversation -- all with the goal of making a difference.

Ironically however, overdose recordings gone viral have pushed some subjects of the photos/videos into recovery. For example, the *New York Times* reported that the Dollar Store recording prompted individuals to reach out to a recovery center outside of Boston, which subsequently offered Mandy McGowan 6 months free treatment. The McGowan video and similar ones have also prompted profound life changes. In the *New York Times* interview, Mandy McGowan remarked, “I see it, and I’m like, I was a piece of freaking [expletive]. That was me in active use. It’s not who I am today.” Kelmae Hemphill, another subject of a viral overdose video told the *New York Times*, “If that video never happened, I probably would have never went to treatment at all.” An unexpected audience of these spectacles is thus the addicts themselves. As spectators of their own misery, ostensibly moments away from death, the user is left no choice but to locate themselves in these representations, producing a kind of reflexive subjectivity.

With the assumption that McGowan is part of the audience consuming the spectacle, many comments included direct messages of support. One commentator with the screenname, “Carole Sessine” responded to an *Eagle Tribune* article, writing, “Believe in yourself. You can do it. Life is good.” Another commentator with the screenname “Katie Walhberg” offered an emotional letter of support:

Dear Mandy, This is the most painful video I’ve ever seen. I almost jumped out of my skin screaming at the people recording to pick up your little girl and comfort her!! (What in the h@#! was wrong with them?) I’m so glad you pulled through and I pray she’s Ok too, and that you two will be reunited. Obviously you’ve done a lot right by her, because she was very attached and concerned and bonded to you. Ignore any hurtful comments; IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK. It only matters that she isn’t psychologically harmed and that her mom is alive and healthy and there for her, as someday she may be for you. Please, please anytime you’re tempted to relapse, watch that video and remember what a beautiful gift you have been given and the awesome responsibility that entails. If that’s not a reason to quit I don’t know what is. Much love to you and your little girl. I’m hoping and praying for a happy outcome to this story.

Other commentators, however, were not as kind. One comment, and many others of similar nature fiercely scrutinized the mother.

She lost her meal ticket to children's services. Her drug money. Of course she wants to get help now. It's only a 30 day program that is what those programs are all about. She needs the kid back to get the free money.

The McGowan overdose spectacles, therefore generated starkly contrasting discourses. On one end there are discourses that voice public support for the survivor, and on the other end there are discourses that place public scrutiny on the survivor. Simultaneously, there are on one end discourses that lay blame on the media and the producers of the spectacle and on the other end discourses that lay blame on the subject of the video. The oppositional lenses/frameworks highlight the contradictory ways in which content producers and audiences are processing the overdose spectacle. What is common amongst most of the user reactions, however is the activation of anger, demonstrating that 'overdose porn' can produce outrage from all sides of the political spectrum. Meanwhile the overwhelming presence of negative affect in the headlines, including sadness, fear and anger, coupled with personalized storytelling and use of visceral language, help to generate highly charged news content.

### **c. Race, Place, Gender and Class**

The images and discourses related to Mandy McGowan's very public overdose are packed with coded allegories about race, class, gender, and human geographies. The location of the overdose in a "dollar store" in Lawrence, Massachusetts conveys important connotative information about race and class and gender. The dollar store is a loaded signifier—rife with stereotypes about the 'poor' and in many cases "white trash" clientele. Meanwhile, Mandy McGowan has been pejoratively labelled as the "Dollar Store Junkie," revealing powerful classed assumptions about addiction. It is unclear where this title



originated from, but it was repeated in several sources, included the *New York Times*. Through the “Dollar Store Junkie” frame viewers from around the nation and globe are allowed to observe the spectacle with reproachful eyes. From a privileged vantage point, overdosing in a dollar store, with a child present can epitomize a proletariat, low class existence. Viewing such a spectacle through this lens can affirm old archetypes about the poor and motherhood—that destitute mothers are having too many babies that cannot be cared for. As one YouTube commentator wrote, “these types of people should not be having kids.” The gendered and classed discourses around motherhood and maternal responsibilities featured prominently in the coverage on *Turtle Boy Sports*, a Worcester-based blog, specializing in the trolling and public shaming of Massachusetts criminals and politicians, and one-time subject of a libel investigation:

Mandy is a selfish, irresponsible, child endangering, white trash cancer on societies grundle. When paramedics got to her, it took not one but TWO doses of Narcan to revive her festering carcass. Her story? She was tired and “dozed off.” She tried to explain that she did the drugs and then got a phone call from her “stepson” that she had to go pick up her baby.

What REALLY happened is Mandy blew a bunch of junk up her nose, stuffed the used straws in her diaper bag and toted her daughter to the scummiest Family Dollar in the Mingya Valley wearing footie pajamas and no shoes. I don’t buy her story and there’s only 2 scenarios here: 1) You already had your kid with you while you were snorting dope off a dusty dashboard or 2) you had your friend (who I’m 900% positive wasn’t sober) drive to go pick her up. Either way you’re a negligent, perfumed pig.

The above tirade contains glaring biases about class, gender, and drug use. From this mental framework, Mandy McGowan can be judged more harshly because she is a woman and a mother, and ostensibly poor. On the other end there were alternative media outlets that problematized the dominant representations of gender, class, and race in the coverage of the

McGowan case. One post on [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org), a website that gathers, “news, analysis and commentary from the socialist point of view” expressed strong critiques of the punitive discourses and practices around McGowan’s overdose:

The response has been a full-blown moral panic—shaming drug users and calling for them to be jailed and their kids taken away—that has all the hallmarks of past anti-drug panics, including the hysteria around crack cocaine use in the late 1980s.

Then, as now, it was poor and working-class people who were vilified. In that case, African Americans were singled out, and especially African American women, who were accused of giving birth to a generation of permanently disabled “crack babies”—a claim that has been thoroughly debunked.

Thankfully, Mandy McGowan survived her overdose in Lawrence, but her daughter has been taken from her by the state, and she has been charged with child endangerment. The video of her is being used to victimize drug users, and women drug users in particular.

Although both punitive and humanitarian lenses are applied to the Mandy McGowan overdose spectacle, most of the headlines do not frame the incident in criminal terms. Only six out of the thirty-five headlines mention a crime, and all of them criminal endangerment. Many commentators have pointed out that coverage has been largely sympathetic to McGowan and some attribute this to her gender. One commentator on a *Washington Post*, for example wrote:

I have to wonder how many of you “poor dear” bleeding heart types would have reacted if the story had been about a man ODing on heroin in a toy store with the kid looking on. You would be calling for his head on a platter... jail would be too good for him.

Then others suggest that addiction is not a gendered issue...well it most certainly is. Society responds to it in completely different ways. Plenty of drug addicts are in prison already but that are mostly male. Many thousands of them have kids too...

So why should she be treated any differently?? Ah yes... White female privilege strikes again!

These commentaries also highlight that there are also powerful signifiers about race embedded in the narratives around McGowan's overdose. That Mandy McGowan, from predominantly white New Hampshire, experienced an overdose seen by millions in Lawrence Massachusetts, a city heavily populated with immigrants from Latin America, potentially reinforces hegemonic narratives around race, especially in the specific context of the Merrimack Valley. Lawrence is a city riven with histories of racialized violence and working-class strife (Barber, 2017). The city has also been singled out by the federal, state and local police, the government of New Hampshire, state and federal attorneys, and even the President of the United States. The U.S. Attorney of Massachusetts, Andrew Lelling, Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, New Hampshire Governor, Chris Sununu, and President Donald Trump have all issued public statements characterizing Lawrence as a regional pipeline for fentanyl funneling into New Hampshire. The sanctuary city of Lawrence has also been repeatedly described as a haven for criminals, illegal aliens, and drug dealers. In the context of these racialized discourses, amplified at the regional and national levels, a white New Hampshire woman overdosing in Lawrence, Massachusetts dollar store may be loaded with significations, particularly about immigration and drugs. For example, responding to a CBS Local Boston story about the overdose video, user Jan Nielson, wrote "Let Trump build that wall and consider the death penalty for these merchants of death." Some commentators were also quick to point out that the individuals recording the video are "Hispanic" and heard "speaking in Spanish" Another commentator on Patch.com with the screenname "happyinnh" wrote:

Almost as disgusting as the mother who ODs while shopping with her toddler, is the stupid idiots that stand there, filming, and talking about it (in Spanish, no less) for 2 friggin' minutes without doing a damn thing to comfort the child or render any aid whatsoever to the mother. Deport them now!

These comments contain the same overtly racist tropes found in the anti-immigration rhetoric amplified by Trump and his Alt-Right contingency. In the context of the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley, these comments also show how ideological displacement works to deflect the powerful emotions of anger, blame, panic, and fear onto a folk devil—in this case illegal immigrants. Through this reading, the moral panic stemming from opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley, achieves the same rhetorical function as previous epidemics—to further the surveillance and policing of black and brown communities—in this case Latinx immigrants in the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts.

These discourses, however have consistently been met with counterhegemonic resistance—particularly commentary that reveals persistent contradictions and paradoxes in the war on drugs. For example, one commentator on a CBS Local Boston article about the McGowan case wrote, “White women get treatment, black men get prison.” Another commentator on a *Washington Post* article posted a sarcastic parable to demonstrate the hypocrisy behind the recently embraced sympathy and leniency towards addicts and addiction:

I want to know when the white community is going to stand up and DO something about these individuals in their community! Single mothers ODing, most likely on welfare and OBVIOUSLY not taking care of their kids! Where are the fathers in all this? And WHY should the hard-working taxpayers be taking care of them and having our hard-earned money stolen by the government to help them out when they OBVIOUSLY can't take care of their own! Why can't they just take responsibility for themselves! "snark"

Or in other words...where is all the outrage and ranting and raving by the ultra-right-wing-conservative-GOP-"christians" about their OWN now that the "drug scourge" is happening to them?! WHY are these individuals treated with patience, concern, respect and lenience by law enforcement and not thrown in prison for years on end (to better profit the privately owned prisons of course!) rather than patted on the hand and driven off to "rehab" at the hard-working taxpayers expense?! My how things change once the "drug-scourge" becomes a white problem huh! SMHID

This highlights the often-mentioned inconsistencies between the crack and opioid epidemics, in terms of policing and media coverage. While the crack epidemic was presented as a punitive spectacle the opioid epidemic has been viewed largely through a humanitarian lens that privileges treatment over incarceration and treats addiction as a public health problem rather than a criminal problem. These discursive shifts line up with shifts in the demographics of addiction—from the poor in largely inner cities, to rural and suburban white communities. Despite these shifts the logic of ideological displacement largely remains the same. In the specificity of the Merrimack Valley many discourses in circulation have re-appropriated the old tropes of the ‘racialized moral panic.’ Packed into the image of the immigrant are all of society’s deepest anxieties, fears, anger about the social disintegration, death, and malaise wrought by the opioid scourge. Through greater scrutiny of the complicated responses to overdose spectacles we can begin to understand the complex ways emotion is evoked to communicate ideas about race, class, and gender.

## **2. Courtney Griffin**

The second set of images consists of several photos used to memorialize the life of Courtney Griffin of Newton, New Hampshire. According to her obituary, Courtney Griffin was born in Lawrence, MA and attended the Fisk School in Salem, NH, until moving to Newton, NH at the age of 8. In high school she played the French Horn in the band and was a member of the Tennis Club. She travelled to Europe and Hawaii and aspired to join the Marine Corps. These are all indications of a ‘normal’ middle-class upbringing, but as an adolescent and young adult Courtney fought a very private battle with addiction. After

several attempts at sobriety and several relapses, Courtney fatally overdosed in September 2014. She was scheduled to enter a treatment program the same week.

#### **a. Circulation**

The images of Courtney Griffin, unlike the notorious thumbnail image and video of Mandy McGowan, which were circulated widely across the web, were only distributed among select media sources. The images were only found in fourteen news stories on the web. Out of those six came from the *Eagle Tribune*, the same North Andover, Massachusetts newspaper, which released the controversial McGowan video to the public. The images of Courtney Griffin were also featured prominently in sources with high journalistic clout that draw a largely educated audience, such as *The New York Times*, NPR and BBC. The BBC was the only international source to carry any of the images. It was not featured on any celebrity gossip or pop culture cites. Surprisingly, CNN and Fox News, the only national cable new services to carry the images, ran very similar stories about Courtney Griffin. Out of the fourteen news stories featuring the images one was international, three were national, and ten were regional. This suggested that the story had limited appeal among international and national audiences, with greater appeal in the regional markets covering Boston and Southern New Hampshire.

Table 6: Internet news headlines for the Courtney Griffin story with source, sentiment and emotion

Headline	Source	Sentiment (%)
		Emotion (%)
<i>Politics In Real Life: Dying From Overdose While Waiting For Treatment</i>	NPR	Positive 8.7
		Neutral 8.5
		<b>Negative 82.9</b>
<i>'THE DAY SHE DIED ... EVERYTHING JUST STOPPED': Creating the Courtney Griffin Sober House important, and bittersweet</i>	Eagle Tribune	<b>Fear: 28.03</b>
		<b>Positive 66.2</b>
		Neutral 4.6
		Negative 29.2
		<b>Sad: 62.25</b>

<i>Access denied: Addicts ready for treatment may find treatment unready for them</i>	Eagle Tribune	Positive 7 <b>Neutral 67.8</b> Negative 25.2 <b>Angry: 29.8</b>
<i>Courtney's story: A tale of addiction</i>	Eagle Tribune	<b>Positive 70.2</b> Neutral 19.5 Negative 10.3 <b>Happy: 33.5</b>
<i>'If you can get them treatment, they can survive': Families affected by addiction face financial woes, insurance struggles</i>	Eagle Tribune	Positive 14.8 Neutral 14 <b>Negative 71.1</b> <b>Sad: 34.04</b>
<i>Courtney &amp; Chris: A story of young love and deadly addiction</i>	Eagle Tribune	<b>Positive 90.9</b> Neutral 5.7 Negative 3.4 <b>Happy 32.19</b>
<i>Family and friends of heroin overdose victim gather in Kingston Saturday</i>	WMUR	Positive 28 Neutral 33.6 <b>Negative 38.3</b> <b>Excited 28.5</b>
<i>In Heroin Crisis, White Families Seek Gentler War on Drugs</i>	New York Times	Positive 9.9 Neutral 33.5 <b>Negative 56.7</b> <b>Sad: 25.59</b>
<i>From grief to advocacy, a father takes action on opioid epidemic</i>	Concord Monitor	Positive 13.2 <b>Neutral 49.4</b> Negative 37.4 <b>Excited: 28.42</b>
<i>Unlikely face of heroin epidemic in small town America</i>	BBC	Positive 20.3 <b>Neutral 45.6</b> Negative 34.1 <b>Fear: 26.83</b>
<i>Portraits of Heartbreak: New Hampshire mom raising awareness of opioid deaths through art</i>	Fox News	<b>Positive 83.2</b> Neutral 9.1 Negative 7.7 <b>Sad: 70.61</b>
<i>New Hampshire mom turns hearts broken by addiction into art</i>	CNN	<b>Positive 83.4</b> Neutral 1.1 Negative 15.5. <b>Sad: 63.79</b>
<i>Newton man whose daughter died from overdose will head NH chapter of national anti-drug effort</i>	Eagle Tribune	Positive 36 Neutral 23.4 <b>Negative 41.6</b> <b>Sad: 34.66</b>
<i>Families of N.H. heroin OD victims advocate for aid in opioid fight</i>	The Rochester Voice	Positive 34.2 <b>Neutral 39.6</b> Negative 26.2 <b>Angry: 31.49</b>

## **b. Accrual of Affect: Emotion and Sentiment in Context**

Overall there were 14 (n=14) headlines that were included in the analysis. All of the headlines were imported into the Parallel Dots software for ‘sentiment’ and ‘emotion’ analysis. The sentiment in the headlines was mixed between positive (n=5 or 35.71% of sample), negative (n=5 or 35.71% of sample), and neutral (n=4 or 26.57% of sample). The most common emotion detected was sad (n=6 or 42.85%), followed by fear (n=2 or 14.28%), angry (n=2 or 14.28%), happy (n=2 or 14.28%) and excited (n=2 or 14.28%). There were no headlines that recorded a predominant emotion of bored. These numbers suggest that the headlines employed a mix of emotive language in the coverage of the Courtney Griffin overdose story. While negative sentiments were most pronounced in the Mandy McGowan headlines, the Courtney Griffin sample was divided roughly equal between negative, neutral, and positive. Sadness was the most common emotion detected, but there was a greater diversity of emotions represented in the sample, including fear, happiness, anger, and excitement.

Contextual analysis of the content of the articles gives greater insight into the complexity of the rhetoric around Griffin’s life and death. Overall, several themes were identified through thorough review of the content. First, the stories about Courtney Griffin commonly amplified discourses condemning conventional narratives about addiction. Many of the statements attempt to counter pejorative views towards “junkies.” The drug addict once occupied a distant subaltern universe, but now they are “someone’s” son or daughter. Doug Griffin told the *New York Times*, “When I was a kid, junkies were the worst...I used to have an office in New York City. I saw them.” But now, according to Mr. Griffin, “they’re



working right next to you and you don't even know it. They're in my daughter's bedroom — they are my daughter.” An article entitled, *New Hampshire mom turns hearts broken by addiction into art* featured on CNN's website chronicles how Anne Marie Zafagna, whose daughter died of an overdose one month after Courtney, began painting the portraits of young New Hampshire residents lost to the opioid epidemic. As the article states, “it paints a different picture of those who struggle with addiction.” The picture that is being painted is not one of a dispossessed “junkie,” but of “everyday” people. As Zafagna told Fox News, “when you see a picture of someone — a portrait — you see their essence and their spirit. The feeling of loss is much more profound.” Zafagna went on to paint Courtney Griffin and her boyfriend Christopher Honor, who fatally overdosed one year after Courtney (see figure 21).

Christopher Honor's mother Amanda Jordan told CNN that the paintings don't depict the “horrible monsters many people make addicts to be.” A 2015 *Eagle Tribune* article, listed as one of top 10 most read stories of year, titled, *Courtney & Chris: A story of young love and deadly addiction*, narrativizes the young couple's devotion to one another and their enslavement to an addiction that ultimately killed them both. The article contains deeply personal details about both Courtney and Chris, many captured through interviews with family members. The dramatic storytelling helps to create an emotional connection to the characters in this tragic romance. Chris' mother even calls it a “Romeo and Juliet story”. The story follows a narrative arc that will be very familiar to most readers: Boy meets girl, they fall in love, and soon encounter conflicts that ultimately have tragic consequences. The *Eagle Tribune* article sums up their story with condensed exposition, climax and denouement:

Christopher Honor and Courtney Griffin were in love, but they couldn't save each other. He was a talker, tall and lanky, with big dreams and an even bigger love of sports. She was bright, adventurous and funny, always a presence in the room.

Neither one wanted to be a heroin addict. Though they followed different paths to drugs, they fought for recovery for the same reason: They wanted to squelch the demon that drove them back to relapse time and time again. They wanted to regain their lives.

Courtney succumbed to her addiction Sept. 29, 2014. The 20-year-old was scheduled to go to rehab that week.

Less than a year later, on Sept. 5, Chris died of an apparent overdose in the same home in Plaistow where Courtney perished. He was 22.

The personalized storytelling in many of the articles produces a humanizing effect. Those lost to the opioid epidemic are no longer just numbers—provisional citizens—faceless junkies left to die in alleyways—undesirables discarded by society. They are “someone’s” son or daughter, brother, or sister, boyfriend or girlfriend. With these pronouncements of humanity, the families of those lost can lift long standing taboos about addiction, giving way to newly empowered voices that can be injected into public discourse. As Mr. Griffin told the *Concord Monitor*, “They’re paying more attention because people are screaming about it.” It seems to be working. Popular language framing addiction as a “disease” rather than a “choice” or a “crime” have entered the lexicon of public health practitioners, politicians, and the law enforcement community. In a 2016 interview with NPR about Courtney’s death, Michael Botticelli, director of National Drug Control Policy, had the following to say.

And it's really tragic that people aren't able to get care and are often dying when they are on waiting lists. We know addiction is a disease. Every other disease, you get treatment on demand, and that's what we want. (Keith, 2016, May 12).

This demonstrates that these discourses have been elevated to the highest levels of the U.S. government, and the Courtney Griffin story is one motivation for the softer tone toward addicts. The transmission of these discourse is often facilitated through direct communication channels between families of addicts, and top government officials. For example, Doug

Griffin testified before a panel at St. Anselm College attended by acting deputy administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Michael Botticelli. During the panel Botticelli met with Doug Griffin, who gave him a prayer card from Courtney's funeral (see figure 20). The prayer card, featuring a smiling portrait of Courtney (a cropped version of the photo found in many news stories) is one of several Botticelli keeps in his coat pocket. As Botticelli told NPR, "I take them out of my pocket at night and say, 'What did you do today, to make a difference?'"...There are real people behind these numbers" (Keith, 2016, May 12). This example illustrates how emotional personal narratives and accompanying imagery have the profound ability to shape drug policy discussions at the local, state, and federal levels.

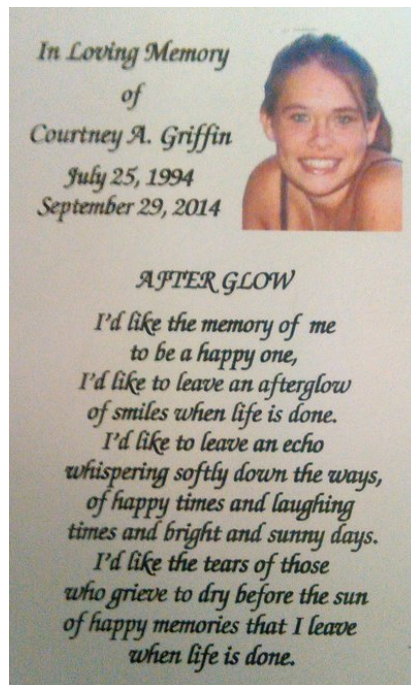


Figure 20: Prayer card from Courtney Griffin's funeral



Figure 21: Portrait of Courtney Griffin painted by Anne Marie Zanfagna

Adopting a more sympathetic affect towards addiction also requires dismantling the law and order orthodoxy that defined the war on drugs for decades. This is a dominant theme in Doug Griffin’s posthumous crusade against the opioid plague—part of which involves reframing the criminal justice system. As Mr. Griffin told the *Concord Monitor*, “What are you going to do, hire more policemen?...I don’t agree with spending more money on law enforcement. ...You don’t need to be locking more people up.” This brings us to the second theme found prominently across the coverage of Courtney’s life and death: the amplification of discourses condemning conventional approaches to criminal justice and public health. After Courtney’s death the Griffins used various platforms to critique the way addiction has been historically treated in the U.S. from a public health and criminal justice standpoint. As Doug Griffin told the *Concord Monitor*, “We’ve been waiting for the federal government to bail us out, and nothing’s been really happening,” This comment, coming soon after the Obama administration’s bail out of big banks and the auto industry, reflects the growing

popular disdain towards government spending practices, especially during Obama's tenure in office. In an interview with the Courtney's mother Pam, blame for Courtney's death is partially placed on insurance companies for declining treatment coverage because addiction does not qualify as a "life or death" condition. "These kids are struggling. When they are asking for help and the parents are taking them to get help and they have been declined, this is a matter of life or death. Now we are without our daughter," Pam Griffin said. A similar theme was found in a campaign advertisement for Republican. Kelly Ayotte's 2016 bid for one of New Hampshire's senate seats. The ad, titled, "Our family," features emotional statements from both Pam and Doug Griffin, interspersed with several portraits of Courtney also found in several other sources. One shot shows Ayotte in what is presumably the Griffin's home, looking over a photo album, as a voiceover from Pam Griffin explains that Ayotte, "...listened to what we had to say, who we were, she cared about us. She didn't know us. We talked about the ways to remove the stigma of addiction so parents can get help". In another shot Doug Griffin states, "Our insurance company indicated that Courtney's problem wasn't a matter of life and death. So, she was not eligible for treatment." The ad ends with Doug Griffin telling the audience, "Kelly co-authored the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. This Act will save kids' lives and enable families to get the help they need." Kelly Ayotte's choice to boast an endorsement by the Griffins demonstrates the tragic story's symbolic strength (Kelly Ayotte won in 2016). According to an *Eagle Tribune* article, "They've become the poster family for the hundreds of others who have lost a loved one to addiction." The Ayotte advertisement rides on the Griffin story to mobilize New Hampshire on the opioid issue by using several rhetorical techniques. First, the emotional interviews and stirring imagery uses affect to foment personal connections with both Griffins and with Kelly

Ayotte—a theme reinforced by the “Our family” slogan. Second, it frames addiction as a health issue not as a criminal issue, thereby deconstructing commonly held stigmas and stereotypes. Third, it uses the Griffin story to applaud recovery and public health-based to approaches drug addiction—in this case Ayotte’s co-authorship of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, a rare bipartisan piece of legislature that released significant funds and resources to combat the opioid epidemic.

This brings us to the last discursive theme in the coverage of Courtney Griffin’s overdose and its aftermath—the mobilization of material and symbolic resources to shape and direct public policy. In many cases the Griffin utilized direct testimony to state and federal agencies to influence policy decisions. This was facilitated through invitations to speak at the White House, and on the New Hampshire senate floor, where Doug Griffin gave an impassioned plea to improve access to the overdose reducing drug, naloxone (also known by its commercial name, Narcan), As the *New York Times* reported,

Among recent bills passed by the New Hampshire legislature in response is one that gives friends and family access to naloxone, the anti-overdose medication. Mr. Griffin, a few months after his daughter died, was among those testifying for the bill. It was set to pass in May but would not take effect until January 2016 — until Mr. Griffin warned lawmakers that too many lives could be lost in that six-month gap. At his urging, the bill was amended to take effect as soon as it was signed into law. It went into effect June 2. (Seelye et al. 2018, Dec 18).

In this case, Doug Griffin’s words directly altered the course of policy decisions. Mr. Griffin told the *Concord Monitor*, “The way to do this is to do it ourselves. Sitting around and waiting for the federal government to fix the problem isn’t going to happen.” Griffin continued, “I work with 100 people every day — parents, people in recovery, addicts — who are invading the statehouse, doing everything we can to make as much noise as we can to try

to save these kids.” These statements reflect the unprecedented influence that parents have in shaping drug policy. As the *New York Times* feature on the Courtney Griffin explains,

...the growing army of families of those lost to heroin — many of them in the suburbs and small towns — are now using their influence, anger and grief to cushion the country’s approach to drugs, from altering the language around addiction to prodding government to treat it not as a crime, but as a disease. (Seelye et al. 2018, Dec 18)

### **c. Race, Place, Gender, and Class**

Woven into the political discourse of local and national political figures, the Courtney Griffin story possesses a power that must be interrogated. Out of the thousands of lives lost to the opioid crisis in New Hampshire why does the overdose death of Courtney Griffin gain so much attention? Part of the focus when considering this question must be placed on the intersection of race, class and gender within the unique geopolitical configurations of the Merrimack Valley. As a white woman born into a well-to-do family, Courtney Griffin occupies a special position in American society. A young white woman with a promising future fatally overdosing from a mix of fentanyl and heroin goes against all that a normal middle-class suburban life is supposed to represent. The mythic “junkie” of the past came from the dark underbellies of urban environs, lived in abject poverty, and was rarely white—everything that Courtney Griffin is not. Courtney Griffin as one BBC headline put is the, “unlikely face” of the heroin epidemic in the US. Through the circulation of her portrait and the attendant discourses, racial stereotypes about addiction, about femininity, about the stability of the American middle class are shattered. The recent shifts in the demographics of users has been accompanied by sharp representational pivots. While representations of white opioid users can still draw scorn, as illustrated by the Mandy McGowan example, when the “face of addiction” is a young, middle-class and female, there is a new found sympathy—a

dramatic reversal of the punitive gaze. This pivot is expressed not only in the discourses of family members and politicians, but also by members of law enforcement. For example, Laconia, New Hampshire undercover Narcotics Officer Eric Adams spoke to *New York Times* for the feature on Courtney Griffin—offering the following anecdote:

The way I look at addiction now is completely different. I can't tell you what changed inside of me, but these are people and they have a purpose in life and we can't as law enforcement look at them any other way. They are committing crimes to feed their addiction, plain and simple. They need help (Seelye et al. 2018, Dec 18).

When Adams, who is white, proclaims that “these are people” he is tacitly recognizing the shifting subjectivities around addiction. What were once abject bodies are now “people” deserving of sympathy and a more forgiving attitude with regard to criminal justice. White parents, like Pam and Doug Griffin have been critical in steering the conversation. The shifts are acknowledged by former Drug Czar, Michael Botticelli, who met with Doug Griffin and keeps a picture of Courtney in his pocket. Botticelli told the times. “Because the demographic of people affected are more white, more middle class, these are parents who are empowered...They know how to call a legislator, they know how to get angry with their insurance company, they know how to advocate. They have been so instrumental in changing the conversation.”

National Drug Czar Michael Botticelli and Republican Senator, Kelly Ayotte have dramatically raised the profile of the Griffins, but no other figure was more instrumental in shaping the narrative around Courtney Griffin's death than Donald Trump. In an October 15, 2016 speech, just days before the election, then candidate Donald Trump spoke directly about Courtney Griffin. Between jabs at Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, Trump used Courtney's death to call for the detention and deportation of illegal immigrants, for building



the wall, for ending Sanctuary policies, for reinstating mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses, and for providing more treatment options for people suffering from substance use disorders. Republican candidate Trump offered this diatribe:

A Trump Administration will secure and defend our borders. And yes, we will build a wall. A wall will not only keep out dangerous cartels and criminals, but it will also keep out the drugs and heroin poisoning our youth. When I won the New Hampshire primary, I promised the people of New Hampshire that I would stop drugs from pouring into your communities. I am now doubling-down on that promise, and can guarantee you -- we will not only stop the drugs from pouring in, but we will help all of those people so seriously addicted get the assistance they need to unchain themselves. New Hampshire has one of the highest drug overdose death rates in the country. We have to solve this crisis. I have to give credit to my running mate, Mike Pence, on this issue. Mike increased the mandatory minimum sentences for the most serious drug offenders, while expanding access to treatment and prevention options for those struggling with addiction. We must make similar efforts a priority for the nation. Not too long ago we read about Christopher Honor and Courtney Griffin -- a young Rockingham County couple who died of an overdose within a year of each other. Their story of prescription drugs, heroin, wait times for treatment, and missed opportunity in the court system are a tragic reminder of why we need a plan to end the opioid epidemic. First, we will stop the flow of illegal drugs into the country. The number of heroin seizures on the border has tripled since 2008. I've received the first-ever endorsement of our Border Patrol and ICE officers, and under a Trump Administration, we will work with them to end the flow of drugs across our border for good. We are also going to put an end to Sanctuary Cities, which refuse to turn over illegal immigrant drug traffickers for deportation. We will dismantle the illegal immigrant cartels and violent gangs, and we will send them swiftly out of our country. We will aggressively prosecute traffickers of illegal drugs, and provide law enforcement and prosecutors with the resources and support they need to do their jobs. President Obama has commuted the sentences of record numbers of high level drug traffickers, many of them kingpins, and violent armed traffickers with extensive criminal histories. Hillary Clinton promises to continue and expand this approach, turning our streets back over to gangs, drug cartels, and armed career criminals. Over the last few years this administration has been steadily dismantling the federal criminal justice system. Tens of thousands of drug dealers have been released from prison early, including many illegal immigrants--regardless of their history of violence, or ties to transnational gangs and cartels. Second, we will close the shipping loopholes that China and others are exploiting to send dangerous drugs across our borders in the hands of our own postal service. These traffickers use loopholes in the Postal Service to mail fentanyl and other drugs to users and dealers in the U.S. A Trump administration will crack down on this abuse, and give law enforcement the tools they need to accomplish this mission. Third, we will fix the misguided rules and regulations that have made this problem worse. It is tragedy enough that so many Americans are struggling with life-threatening addiction (Remarks by President Trump on the National Security and Humanitarian Crisis on our Southern Border, 2019, Mar 12).

Linking Courtney Griffin's death to illegal immigration, to sanctuary policies and to border security adds another layer of racial complexity to the story. In the speech, Trump describes Courtney Griffin's death as a "tragic reminder" of the need to stop the flow of drug across the border, to embolden the detention efforts of ICE, and for ending sanctuary cities. Trump, simultaneously uses the Griffin story to advocate for "expanding access to treatment and prevention options for those struggling with addiction." This reveals a stunning paradox in Trump's approach to the opioid crisis—heightened policing of black and brown communities, while advancing non-punitive measures for individuals like Courtney Griffin. In this iteration of 'policing the crisis', the Courtney Griffin narrative is used to displace anxieties around the evolving opioid crisis in New Hampshire onto an alien 'other' The 'other' in this case is the immigrant, the 'folk devil' lurking across the border in the sanctuary city of Lawrence, Massachusetts. By summoning this 'folk devil,' and linking it to the death of a white woman, Trump can ride the ensuing moral panic to galvanize support from New Hampshire voters and ultimately forward his draconian immigration agenda.

Trump's racially charged rhetoric about opioids and immigration are explicitly pertinent to the local context of New Hampshire's Merrimack Valley, which may explain at least part of his success in the region. Trump ended up losing in the state of New Hampshire by a narrow margin but won more than 50 percent of the vote in Rockingham county, where Courtney Griffin once resided. In Newton, New Hampshire, the Griffins' hometown, Trump beat Hillary Clinton soundly, by more than 20 points (New Hampshire Election Results (2017, Aug 1). Newton lies on the Massachusetts border, just minutes away from the city of Lawrence, once singled out by Trump as the source of New Hampshire's opioid problem.

Through the examination of the complex conjunctures between race, class, and gender in the specific geopolitical context of the Merrimack Valley we can begin to more fully appreciate the significance of Trump's rhetoric on the opioid crisis.

### **3. Precious Wallaces**

The third image is a portrait of Precious Wallaces, widely used in news coverage of the 11 year-old Haverhill girl's mysterious death, after being found unresponsive in her great uncle's Lawrence, Massachusetts home on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Authorities began to investigate after Wallaces' great uncle, Miguel Rivera called 911 in the middle of the night to report that the 11 year-old girl was having trouble breathing. Investigators later determined that Rivera had paid Precious and her brother to take pills before bedtime. Autopsy reports later confirmed that Precious had fentanyl and prescription sleeping pills in her system at the time of her death. Rivera, 58 was ultimately arrested and indicted on five charges including murder, rape of a child by force, aggravated rape of a child, indecent assault and battery on a child under age 14 and distribution of a class E substance.

The tragic poisoning death of a child in Lawrence Massachusetts is markedly different from the other cases in this chapter. Precious was not an addict, she was the victim of a heinous crime involving fentanyl poisoning. She is also a minor, and a person of color. There are however some similarities. Precious' poisoning death involved the powerful opioid fentanyl, like Courtney Griffin who died a few years prior and several miles north across the New Hampshire line. Courtney, Mandy and Precious are also all female, coexisting in the same geographic region known as the Merrimack Valley, but occupying different worlds. According to a Brown University study based on 2010 census data, the Boston-Cambridge-

Quincy MA-NH statistical area, which includes the Massachusetts counties of Middlesex, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and the New Hampshire counties Rockingham and Stafford has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of segregation between whites and Hispanics and the 11<sup>th</sup> highest rate of segregation between whites and blacks. (Logan and Stultz, 2011). It should be noted that the home towns of Mandy McGowan (Salem, NH), Courtney Griffin (Newton, NH) and Precious Wallaces (Haverill, MA) all lie within this statistical region.

In the racially segregated context of this region, it is imperative to consider how the opioid scourge is understood and communicated across difference. The present study brings attention to the starkly contrasting coverage of the various manifestations of the opioid crisis in Lawrence, MA versus rural or suburban New Hampshire. It should be noted that Lawrence, MA, according to 2016 Massachusetts Department of Public Health records had the most opioid deaths per-person in New England. The overdose rate for Hispanics in Massachusetts doubled between 2015 and 2018, growing at twice the rate of any other group, a state sponsored study showed (Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2018). In spite of this, a standard Google search produced very few headlines about overdose fatalities in Lawrence, MA. Drug arrests were by far the most common search result, which was anticipated considering the racial disparities of sentencing practices in Massachusetts. According the sentencing project, Latinxs in Massachusetts are incarcerated at five times the rate of whites (Nellis, 2016, Jun 14). In view of these disparities, we can begin to more fully appreciate why the tragic opioid poisoning death of Precious Wallaces produced only limited press coverage.

### a. Circulation

Table 7 shows that the image of Precious Wallaces was circulated primarily through small regional news platforms. Out of the 19 stories Newsweek and USNews were the only national outlets to cover the story, and the image was not featured in any international reports. The image appeared in three different *Boston Globe* reports, and on four occasions in the North-Andover based, *Eagle Tribune*. There were two articles that memorialized Precious Wallaces' life featuring interviews with family members and describing how the loss impacted the community. The rest of the stories strictly covered developments in the investigatory and prosecutorial proceedings of the case, and only included statements from members of law enforcement. Hence, the majority of the articles dealt with the objective facts in a fashion that is characteristic of crime reporting.

Table 7: Internet news headlines for the Precious Wallaces story with source, sentiment and emotion

Headline	Source	Sentiment (%)	User Interactions
		Emotion (%)	
<i>Miguel Rivera, the great-uncle of 11-year-old Precious Wallaces who was charged after her death, now facing rape charge</i>	Masslive.com	Positive 17.4 Neutral 22.3 <b>Negative 60.3</b> <b>Angry: 33.78</b>	104
<i>Report: Rivera paid Precious Wallaces to take pills</i>	Eagle Tribune	Positive 29.9 <b>Neutral 45.1</b> Negative 24.9 <b>Fear: 26.05</b>	345
<i>Uncle charged after death of niece, Precious Wallaces, 11</i>	Eagle Tribune	<b>Positive 94.8</b> Neutral 2.7 Negative 2.6 <b>Happy: 35.23</b>	263
<i>Police audio: Girl ate candy, was bleeding prior to death</i>	Eagle Tribune	Positive 10.1 <b>Neutral 29.3</b> Negative 60.5 <b>Fear: 50.55</b>	101

<i>Grand jury probe planned into death of girl, 11</i>	Eagle Tribune	Positive 44.7 Neutral 17.2 Negative 38.1 <b>Angry: 31.88</b>	152
<i>ESSEX COUNTY JAIL INMATE ACCUSED OF RAPING AND KILLING GREAT-NIECE, 11, BEATEN UP</i>	Newsweek	Positive 5 Neutral 12.4 Negative 82.6 <b>Angry: 39.91</b>	1
<i>Police say 11-year-old Precious Wallaces had fentanyl in her system; Great uncle held without bail in connection to Haverhill girl's death</i>	Masslive	Positive 75.8 Neutral 7.1 Negative 17.1 <b>Angry: 28.05</b>	57
<i>Report: Uncle paid Haverhill girl to take pills before she died</i>	Haverill Gazette	Positive 19.9 Neutral 33.3 Negative 46.8 <b>Fear: 31.58</b>	104
<i>'A beautiful and well-loved girl': Haverhill mourns death of 11-year-old student</i>	Boston.com	Positive 89.9 Neutral 7.1 Negative 3.1 <b>Fear: 25.15</b>	195
<i>Police: 11-Year-Old Girl Who Died Had Fentanyl in System</i>	US News	Positive 8 Neutral 19.4 Negative 72.6 <b>Sad: 27.26</b>	ND
<i>Haverhill resident Precious Wallaces died days after going into medical distress at her great uncle's house on Dec. 18</i>	NECN	Positive 51.1 Neutral 27.9 Negative 21 <b>Sad: 60.03</b>	109
<i>Arrest Made In Death Of 11-Year-Old Haverhill Girl Precious Wallaces</i>	CBS Boston	Positive 45.4 Neutral 20.8 Negative 33.8 <b>Angry: 21.19</b>	83
<i>Uncle Charged In Death Of 11-Year-Old Girl Exposed To Fentanyl</i>	Boston.CBS.local	Positive 18 Neutral 28.3 Negative 53.8 <b>Fear: 40.26</b>	277
<i>Grand jury convened to investigate death of 11-year-old Haverhill girl</i>	The Boston Globe	Positive 27.2 Neutral 49.1 Negative 23.8 <b>Fear: 25.47</b>	32
<i>Man Held Without Bail in Connection With Death of 11-Year-Old Great-Niece</i>	NBC Boston	Positive 57.1 Neutral 16.1 Negative 26.7 <b>Sad: 25.38</b>	832

<i>Lawrence man charged in connection with death of Haverhill girl</i>	The Boston Globe	Positive 39.6 Neutral 14.6 <b>Negative 45.8</b>	2
		<b>Fear: 28.98</b>	
<i>Mystery Surrounds Haverhill Girl's Death, Investigation Ongoing</i>	NECN	Positive 23 <b>Neutral 50.2</b> Negative 26.9	123
		<b>Fear: 33.04</b>	
<i>Officials investigating whether toxic exposure played role in death of 11 year old Haverill Girl</i>	The Boston Globe	Positive 13.6 <b>Neutral 45.9</b> Negative 40.5	56
		<b>Fear: 29.91</b>	
<i>Death of girl shocks school, city. Police: Exposure to fentanyl may be to blame</i>	Haverill Gazette	Positive 28.3 Neutral 2.7 <b>Negative 70</b>	ND
		<b>Angry: 33.02</b>	

#### **b. Accrual of Affect: Emotion and Sentiment Analysis**

Overall there were 19 (n=19) headlines that were included in the analysis. All of the headlines were imported into the Parallel Dots software for ‘sentiment’ and ‘emotion’ analysis. The sentiment in the headlines was mixed between negative (n=7 or 36.84% of sample), positive (n=7 or 36.84% of sample) and neutral (n=5 or 26.31% of sample). The emotions detected were mixed between fear (n=8 or 42.1%), angry (n=6 or 31.57%), sad (n=3 or 15.78%) and happy (n=1 or 5.26%). There were no headlines that recorded primary emotions of Excited or Bored. This shows that the sentiment in the headlines was evenly dispersed between negative, neutral, and positive sentiment. Unlike the other two cases the most commonly detected was anger. Also, the headlines for the Precious Wallaces story were less likely to be sad by a wide margin.

Table 8: Six emotions detected in headlines (as a percentage of all headlines)

	Sad	Fear	Angry	Excited	Bored	Happy
Mandy McGowan	40.62	48.67	6.25	3.12	3.12	0
Courtney Griffin	42.85	14.28	14.28	14.28	0	14.28
Precious Wallaces	15.78	42.1	31.57	0	0	5.26

While the headlines for the Precious Wallaces and Courtney Griffin stories were approximately evenly dispersed between negative, neutral and positive sentiments, the headlines for the Mandy McGowan story were overwhelmingly negative. The software detected a predominant negative sentiment in 68.75% of the headlines for the Mandy McGowan story, compared to 35.71% for the Courtney Griffin story, and 36.84% for the Precious Wallaces story.

Table 9: Negative, positive or neutral sentiments detected in headlines (as a percent of all headlines)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Mandy McGowan	12.5	18.75	68.75
Courtney Griffin	35.71	26.57	35.71
Precious Wallaces	36.84	26.31	31.57

### **c. Race, Place, Gender and Class**

In February 2019, Abdullah Shihpar wrote an opinion article for the *New York Times*, entitled “The Opioid Crisis Isn’t White”. In the editorial Shihpar points to evidence that challenges the misconception that the opioid epidemic is a *white* epidemic. Shihpar argues,



“the opioid epidemic is not entirely white — and it’s a mistake to characterize it that way, given how opioids are harming nonwhite communities” –and the statistics back it up. A National Institute of Health study found that the synthetic opioid mortality rates are currently increasing at 79% per year for whites and 107% per year for blacks (Alexander, Kiang, and Barbieri, 2018). In addition to challenging the assumption that opioid epidemic is ‘white’, research has shown, despite popular perceptions, that the *Opioid crisis isn’t rural*. Monnat (2019) for example, found that the average drug mortality rates are highest in large metro counties. In fact, overdose rates seem to drop the farther one goes from metropolitan population centers. Between 2014 and 2016, Monnat (2016) determined that rural areas had an average of 6.2 fewer deaths per 100,000 population than large metro counties. Monnat (2018) attributed this to several factors including economic distress, family distress, persistent population loss, dependence on mining service and industries, and access to opioid supply. If we consider these trends, the epidemic is not as white, and not as rural as it is commonly conceived. The question is: why are popular perceptions of the opioid epidemic at odds with the reality on the ground? The logical approach to answering this question would be to analyze the patterns of representation in the current drug crisis.

#### **D. Discussion**

The data presented in this chapter suggest that there has been consistent whitewashing and ‘gentrification’ of the opioid epidemic. For example, there is no equivalent to Courtney Griffin for black and Latinx communities in New England, or in the nation for that matter. The overdose deaths of the famous black artists, Prince and Michael Jackson received

considerable attention, but poor black and brown communities were rarely, if ever brought into the conversation. While opioid overdoses are rising rapidly amongst black and Latinx populations, media coverage lags far behind—retaining its focus how the crisis impacts white suburban and rural communities. In the context of the Merrimack Valley, the Precious Wallaces case was the only overdose fatality involving a person of color to receive prolonged media attention, and the story was unlike the other cases—it involved heinous and perverse criminal conduct against an 11-year old girl. This demands inquiry into why the Precious Wallaces story gained traction in local media circuits, while the other hundreds of other overdoses involving people of color in the Merrimack Valley went virtually unnoticed by the press. One way to understand the representational patterns in the coverage of the opioid crisis is through the examination of affect in relation to race, class, and gender. This requires evaluating the emotional qualities that make a story ‘valuable’ for newsgatherers. Applying the concept of ‘affective networks,’ may help to explain why the Mandy McGowan overdose video stimulated frequent and widespread engagement from users. The sentiment in the headlines for the Mandy McGowan story were significantly more negative than headlines for the other two stories. Consistent with this pattern, researchers have found that negative messages spread more rapidly and widely on social media than positive or neutral messages (Tsugawa and Ohsaki, 2015). The association between negativity and virility may partly explain the widespread viewing of the McGowan video, but the race, class, gender of the subject must also be considered as possible factors. The discourses attached to the video were often deployed from a position of class privilege and paternalism, with labels such as “white trash,” “dollar store Junkie,” and “perfumed pig” adopted to describe the subject. These markers of class and gender can be used to distance the voyeur from the subject, tacitly

producing feelings of superiority. The Courtney Griffin case, it can be argued achieved the opposite—by the diminishing the distance between viewer and the subject. As a young white female from an affluent suburban community, Courtney Griffin possesses all the markers of normativity—the only exception being her addiction. Sympathy for this fatal ‘disease’ is cultivated through personalized storytelling that emphasizes romance, drama and tragedy. The tragic nature of her death is accentuated through emotive writing and personal interviews with loved ones. This tone is also reflected in the headlines as the Griffin sample contained highest proportions of sadness than the other two cases.

Also worth noting, compared to the McGowan and Griffin cases, the Precious Wallaces headlines were significantly less sad. The Precious Wallaces headlines also had a significantly higher proportion of anger. Could this suggest that when disenfranchised grief involves a racially disenfranchised group it is less likely to be represented with empathy and grief? Could this that disenfranchised death is more likely to be recognized when it elicits rage? Researchers have that anger and rage spread more quickly and more widely online than any other emotion (Berger & Milkman 2012, Fan et al, 2014), but the Precious Wallaces story was not spread widely on social media, and it was not featured in prominent national and international news outlets like the BBC, CNN, Fox News, NPR, the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. It did however, receive much more coverage than other overdose deaths involving people of color in the Merrimack Valley.

These representational patterns suggest that there are complex socio-cultural factors at play as the images linked to high profile stories on the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley circulate across various digital platforms. The images and the attendant discourses followed very different paths of circulation and were accompanied by diverging discursive

constructions. The image of Mandy McGowan, for example, was picked up by regional, national and global online news outlets, amplifying and reverberating far beyond New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The circulation of images associated with Precious Wallaces were on the other hand mostly consigned to local news outlets. The Courtney Griffin case example, although widely circulated, was mostly relegated to online local and regional news sources. Comparing the textual rhetoric that has circulated alongside the three images, reveals very different sets of discursive formations in terms of how racial class and gender subjectivities are constructed.

The diversity of encounters with the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley is demonstrated through the distinct representational patterns of each case and the associated practices and ideologies. Comparing the contexts of the three images reveals some stark divides across socioeconomic and racial lines. Given the histories racial and socioeconomic strife in the Merrimack Valley, and high rate of segregation in the greater Boston metropolitan area, the circulation of images and texts presumably play a significant role in how rural and suburban white folks symbolically imagine urban people of color in relation to the opioid crisis, and vis-versa.

An understanding of complex intersections between class, race, and ideology is required in order to fully appreciate how and why the three images were circulated and appropriated differentially. Grounded in Stuart Hall's model of conjunctural analysis, it is argued that processes of circulation cannot be divorced from signifying practices, or what Hall calls the 'politics of representation,' Following this principle this study attempts to show how dynamic interactions between image and text, through their circulation and amplification can reproduce and reinforce hegemonic representations of race, class, and gender.

Analysis of the digital circulation, and amplification of social anxieties also brings up important questions about the nature of writing and rhetoric in web-based networks. DeVoss and Ridolfo (2009) for example, illustrate how digital writing is organized by a new logic of ‘amplification.’ DeVoss and Ridolfo (2009) use the term, ‘amplification effect’ to describe how after composition, delivery and circulation, digital texts become semi-autonomous entities that are transformed through their interactions with various human and non-human actors. This notion of amplification, along with Gries (2015) new materialist approach can be used to describe how the circulation of texts, such as the images of Courtney Griffin, examined in this study take on new meaning and importance through their digital circulation. In many of the online memorials in which the images of Courtney Griffin were embedded there was no attribution given to the original source or author of the photo. Thus, the impact or amplification is tied more directly to its digital circulation than its production and delivery by a singular auteur. In the process of being circulated the image, underwent several transformations, adding further levels of meanings and new levels of authorship. DeVoss and Ridolfo’s (2009) contemporary notion of amplification can provide a useful corollary to Cohen’s (1972) and Hall et al.’s (1978) conceptualization of “deviancy amplification.” Cohen (1972) and Hall et al. (1978) also demonstrate that other actors besides media producers can play an equally important role in the amplification and circulation of moral panics. For example, Hall et al. (1978) show how statements by police and the judiciary entered into circulation, reinforcing and amplifying the moral panic about ‘mugging’. Hall et al. (1978) explain that, “The role of the police in any campaign of the sort against ‘mugging’ is similar to that of the media, but they come into play at an earlier stage in the cycle. They too ‘structure’ and ‘amplify’” (p. 38). This chapter also illustrates, not only how the media

itself can structure and amplify perceptions of a crisis, but also how family members, policymakers, the judiciary, and members of law enforcement can shape the conversation.

### **E. Conclusion**

Combining a new materialist approach to visual rhetoric (Gries, 2015) with Stuart Hall's (1978) concept of conjunctural analysis outlined in PTC, this chapter has attempted to examine the circulation and amplification of racialized moral panics around the opioid crisis in the Merrimack Valley. By tracking and analyzing images and writing related to three high-profile criminal cases involving opioid overdoses in the Merrimack Valley, this study has provided new insights into how deviancy and racialized threats to social order are circulated through networked practices.

In PTC Stuart Hall and colleagues provide a compelling framework for scrutinizing the discursive construction of crises but should not be uncritically affixed to any given context. As such, the opioid scourge sweeping across United States must not be viewed simply as a modern facsimile of the 'mugging epidemic' in early 1970's U.K. While by Hall et al.'s accounts the "mugging epidemic" was largely a contrived crisis, manufactured by politicians, judges and the press, the opioid epidemic by all empirical measures is a true crisis. In early 1970's U.K. society the harsh punitive response to the 'mugging crisis' was out of all proportions to the actual reality. For the opioid epidemic the inverse seems to be true—the press, politicians, and members of the judiciary have responded to the mounting crisis with compassion and forgiveness, rather than the strict intolerance associated with previous drug scourges—what I have previously referred to as "inverting *Policing the Crisis*."

As a result, a softer war on drugs is sought in both discourse and practice—from the sympathetic decrees of judges and prosecutors, anti-stigma polemics of politicians and members of the media core, and the policing prerogatives set forth by federal, state and local attorneys and law enforcement. Accompanying this shift are new rhetorical constructs of opioid use and users—one that favors treatment and compassion over mass incarceration. Withstanding all of this, the often-repeated narrative that the opioid crisis has completely softened the hearts of the ‘war on drugs’ hardliners, must be challenged. While there is increasing compassion towards substance abuse in white populations, a militant war on drugs still rages on outside of the comfortable confines of suburban America—in communities like Lawrence, MA. Lawrence sits perilously at the frontlines of both the war on drugs and Trump’s war on immigration—battles simultaneously waged through discourse and practice. For the Trump administration, immigration and drug policy talking points often overlap and intersect. When Trump connects Courtney Griffin’s overdose death to the border, he is discursively tethering two crises—the opioid epidemic and illegal immigration. The linkage is reinforced when Trump demands that we, “put an end to Sanctuary Cities, which refuse to turn over illegal immigrant drug traffickers for deportation” and it is narrowed to the specificity of the Merrimack Valley when Trump blames New Hampshire’s opioid crisis on sanctuary policies in Lawrence, Massachusetts. With this logic, the immigrant community can be held culpable for the death and malaise that has shattered New Hampshire’s bucolic image, while providing justification for the uneven deployment of ‘law and order’ regimes in the modern war on drugs.

On the level of representation, these significations gain their symbolic strength through dual processes—what Stuart Hall has referred to as ‘ideological displacement’ and the

“deviancy amplification spiral.” The opioid crisis, and all of its associations with other the calamities—the crisis of whiteness, the crisis of masculinity, the crisis of the post-industrial economy—can be referentially tethered to one powerful signifier—the mythical immigrant. This clash carrying out on the field of representation, pits an anointed folk hero—pseudo-populist strong man, Donald Trump—against a rogue folk devil. In this fight, all that society fears, distrusts, and despises, and can be ideologically displaced onto the immigrant adversary. The same currents ripple through Margaret Thatcher’s promises to preserve the English identity by instituting a “law and order” regime that will *Make Britain Great Again*, as Stuart Hall perceptively observed. Through political discourses by both Trump and Thatcher, and subsequent magnification by mainstream media hype, the immigrant’s association with deviance and criminality is crystalized in the public mind. The moral panic that ensues emanates from the perceived threat of immigrants—towards public safety, health, well-being—a process Stanley Cohen and later Stuart Hall referred to as the “deviance amplification spiral.”

With opioid deaths now outpacing gun related homicides as a leading cause of death, it is increasingly important to understand both material and symbolic responses being strategically formulated by citizens, journalists, law enforcement agencies, and lawmakers. Recently, the legalization of recreational marijuana in many U.S. states, criminal justice and prison reforms, and shifts to public health centered approaches to substance abuse have altered the course of the war on drugs. Nonetheless, the carceral state continues to operate a fiercely punitive campaign against drugs in many urban and low-income communities with large minority populations.



While treating addiction as a public health, rather than a criminal issue, can be lauded as part of wider progressive reforms and approaches to illicit drug use, one must critically examine who benefits from these rhetorical pivots. Research gathered in this chapter suggests that when the drug use is symbolically associated with black and brown bodies, rhetoric and policy, take on a more sympathetic form. In this way we can start to understand the real and felt impact of discourses related to opioid addiction, and how these discourses are applied differentially across race, class, and gender. In the pursuit of more just drug policy, dialogues and planning must incorporate and value perspectives and experiences of *all* people.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **FRAMING THE CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF JUDICIAL DISCOURSES ON THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC**

#### **A. Introduction**

This chapter broadens focus to examine the prevailing opioid-related discourses produced and circulated from the highest ranks of the Trump Administration. Examining opioid related discourses from a wider frame allows the researcher to situate specific findings from the Merrimack Valley case study within a broader political, social, and cultural context. In many cases the tone on opioids is set by the executive and judicial branches of the government. Of particular emphasis in this chapter is the rhetoric emanating from the Attorney General's office. As the nation's top prosecutor, the Attorney General can exercise broad judicial power, not only to influence criminal justice policies, but also shape national conversations about crime and criminal justice. To gain a comprehensive account of prominent judicial discourses about opioids, over 70 public speeches delivered by former Attorney General Jeffrey Sessions were coded for content and analyzed thematically. In addition, relationships between concepts and terms were charted using text visualization tools. In unison these methods provide a compelling picture of the predominant thematic patterns in judicial opinions about the opioid crisis. The speeches of Attorney General were chosen as they are representative of the administrations early approach to drug and immigration policy (which are often intertwined) and set the tone for conduct and procedures of local, state, and federal police agencies. Overall, it was found that Jeffrey Sessions' discourse about the opioid crisis served to advance a law and order approach to

immigration, while providing few prosecutorial recommendation or legal opinions on the practices of the pharmaceutical companies, widely known to have fueled the opioid crisis.

### **1. “We’ll Build the Wall to Keep the Damn Drugs Out.”**

Before we begin examining the judicial discourses of Jeffrey Sessions, they must be put in appropriate political context. Jeffrey Sessions was one of Donald Trump’s earliest and most ardent supporters and was appointed by Donald Trump for his hardliner and law and order approach to drugs, crime, and immigration. In many cases there is strong overlap in the terminology, imagery, and rhetorical strategies used by Trump and Sessions. One such overlap is the use of the violent street gang, MS-13 as an ominous example for dangers of ‘weak’ immigration policy. The street gang features prominently in many of Sessions’ speeches and is a favorite boogie man of Trump. For both figures MS-13 serves as a tantalizing metaphor that activates the imaginary about a violent and backwards “other” and sustains the white victimhood narrative, which has been an underlying theme of Trump’s “Make America Great Again” doctrine. In addition, a favorite target for Trump and Sessions has been sanctuary cities, with both advocating for depriving such jurisdictions of federal funding—a measure that has been vetoed repeatedly by higher courts. Both have also proposed introducing the death penalty for “drug dealers.” This proposal, unprecedented in the American context, seems to take its cue from an authoritarian figure often praised by Trump—Rodrigo Duterte, President of the Philippines—who has made simple drug possession a capital offense. For example, during a March 18, 2018 speech in the Merrimack Valley city of Manchester, New Hampshire speech, Trump remarked,

If you look at — if you look at other countries — I’ve gotten to know the leaders of many countries. And I won’t mention names, but you know the countries I’m talking about. I go around, “How is your drug problem?” “We don’t have much of a drug problem.” “What do you mean you don’t have a drug problem?” “Well, we don’t have.” I say, how come? “We have zero tolerance for drug dealers.” I said, “What does that mean?” “That means we have the death penalty for drug dealers. We don’t have a drug problem.” (Remarks by President Trump on Combatting the Opioid Crisis, 2018, Mar 19).

The unnamed leader in Trump’s ‘dialogue’ is clearly Duterte, who has asserted that his application of the capital punishment for minor drug offenses, “...is not only about deterrence, it's also about retribution.” Threats of extreme punitive measures proposed by Trump are also about reprisal, yet, stand apart in their racial and class overtones. The exclusion of large pharmaceutical companies from the discussion of the death penalty, and simultaneous emphasis on actors from Mexico, China, and poor immigrant communities in the U.S., suggest that Trump’s solution to the opioid crisis, like previous efforts in the war on drugs, would disproportionately target working class and minority communities. In the following excerpt from his New Hampshire speech the President transitions between talking points about large seizures of fentanyl from China and Mexico, ‘criminal aliens’ in the US, and drug crimes, and concludes with his radical solution—death penalty for drug dealers.

Our Customs and Border Protection — and these people, the job they do is incredible — seized nearly 1,500 pounds of fentanyl last year, nearly three times the amount seized in 2016. And I told China: Don’t send it. (Applause.) And I told Mexico: Don’t send it. Don’t send it.

In 2017, ICE arrested criminal aliens with 76,000 charges and convictions for dangerous drug crimes.”

You know, it’s an amazing thing. Some of these drug dealers will kill thousands of people during their lifetime — thousands of people — and destroy many more lives than that. But they will kill thousands of people during their lifetime, and they’ll get caught and they’ll get 30 days in jail. Or they’ll go away for a year, or they’ll be fined. And yet, if you kill one person, you get the death penalty or you go to jail for life.

So if we're not going to get tough on the drug dealers who kills thousands of people and destroy so many people's lives, we are just doing the wrong thing. We have got to get tough. This isn't about nice anymore. This isn't about committees. This isn't about let's get everybody and have dinners, and let's have everybody go to a Blue Ribbon committee and everybody gets a medal for, frankly, talking and doing nothing. This is about winning a very, very tough problem. And if we don't get very tough on these dealers, it's not going to happen, folks. It's not going to happen. And I want to win this battle (Remarks by President Trump on Combatting the Opioid Crisis, 2018, Mar 19).

Implementing sweeping legislative changes to the penal code would necessarily face tough hurdles in congress, and legal opposition on state and federal levels, and therefore is unlikely to occur. Outside changes to the criminal justice process, Trump's speech, however, may serve a larger discursive function—to link immigration to crime, and crimes perpetrated by immigrants to white victims. The same logic is used to generate support for the southern border wall, as well as the suspension of Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In the same Manchester, New Hampshire speech, Trump proclaimed to an overwhelmingly white audience, “Ninety percent of the heroin in America comes from our southern border, where, eventually, the Democrats will agree with us and we'll build the wall to keep the damn drugs out.” The audience responded with the signature chants often heard at Trump's campaign rallies, “Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall!” As the chants died down president continued with a tirade against democrats for, “trying to tie the wall to DACA, and DACA to the wall.” He then includes references to the 2015 San Francisco shooting of 33 year-old, Kate Steinle by undocumented immigrant, Jose Inez Garcia Zarate. With San Francisco's status as a sanctuary city, Kate Steinle's status as a white woman, and Jose Inez Garcia Zarate's status as a “alien” who had entered the country illegally, this case provided the perfect characters and storyline to Trump's script. The narrative casting sanctuary cities as havens for violent criminals, and immigrants as drug dealers, rapists and murderers, going back to Trump's campaign for the presidency, however, is based firmly in fantasy. A Center

for American Progress study found that crime is statistically lower in sanctuary counties compared to non-sanctuary counties, with 35.5 fewer crimes per 100,000 people (Wong, 2017, Jan 26). Furthermore, four other studies have concluded independently that illegal immigration does not increase violent crime. One U.K. study published in the journal, *Migration Letters* found that young undocumented immigrants in the U.S. engage in less crime than their legal or U.S. born counterparts (Bersani et al., 2018). In the face of these facts, Trump has continued attempts to triangulate a relationship between crime, immigration, and the opioid crisis.

Trump's most public attempts to crystalize this relationship were on display during his January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018 State of the Union Address. Flanked by several influential white men to his rear, including then Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan and Vice-President Mike Pence, Trump delivered several memorable statements attempting to link immigration to economic despair and to the opioid epidemic. For example, Trump proclaimed emphatically,

For decades, open borders have allowed drugs and gangs to pour into our most vulnerable communities. They have allowed millions of low-wage workers to compete for jobs and wages against the poorest Americans. Most tragically, they have caused the loss of many innocent lives (Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address, 2018, Jan 30).

While it is unclear, whether Trump attributes the loss of these "innocent lives" to violent crime or to drug overdose, it is apparent that he is fomenting a discursive link between undocumented immigrants and the death of Americans. In the speech, Trump furthers his case in an emotional tribute to two teenagers who were killed by the notorious gang, MS-13 in the predominantly immigrant community of Brentwood, Long Island, N.Y. As the camera

shifts from front stage to the crowd, and narrows in on two sets of grieving parents, Trump proclaims the following:

Here tonight are two fathers and two mothers: Evelyn Rodriguez, Freddy Cuevas, Elizabeth Alvarado, and Robert Mickens. Their two teenage daughters—Kayla Cuevas and Nisa Mickens—were close friends on Long Island. But in September 2016, on the eve of Nisa’s 16th birthday, such a happy time it should have been, neither of them came home. These two precious girls were brutally murdered while walking together in their hometown. Six members of the savage MS-13 gang have been charged with Kayla and Nisa’s murders. Many of these gang members took advantage of glaring loopholes in our laws to enter the country as illegal, unaccompanied alien minors—and wound up in Kayla and Nisa’s high school.

Evelyn, Elizabeth, Freddy, and Robert: Tonight, everyone in this chamber is praying for you. Everyone in America is grieving for you. Please stand. Thank you very much. I want you to know that 320 million hearts right now are breaking for you. We love you. Thank you. While we cannot imagine the depth that kind of sorrow, we can make sure that other families never have to endure this pain (Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address, 2018, Jan 30).

MS-13 is an undeniably brutal criminal organization, but the selective usage of this sensational story is another example of Trump constructing a false narrative to criminalize an entire group. As one of Trump’s favorite bogeymen, the image of MS-13 is often conjured to stand in discursively for fears about contamination from the ‘other’—in this case being immigrants. Having retweeted or tweeted about the gang 35 times as of October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018 MS-13 is featured prominently in Trump’s strategy to stir fear of immigrants among his base. In a June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018 tweet Trump even claimed to have witnessed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) “liberating a town from the grasp of MS-13” (realDonaldTrump, 2018, June 30). This tweet, like many others released by the President was confirmed by independent fact checkers to be a total fabrication. The portrayal of MS-13 as an occupying alien force also conforms to the racialized “folk devil” archetype according to Stuart Hall’s

conception as, “an almost mythical figure, “...on to whom all our most intense feelings about things going wrong, and all our fears about what undermine our fragile insecurities are projected...” (p. 161). To rural and suburban White American, the widely circulated signifier of MS-13 (mostly images of brown men covered in tattoos) serves to provoke anxieties about white identity and can easily be fused semiotically with the broader sign of “immigrant.”

Trump’s repeated references to MS-13 gang members as “animals” and “not people,” can also produce a more generalized schema to describe all immigrants as violent and less than human, and thus further his draconian immigration agenda. This strategy was apparent in Trump’s State of the Union address. Immediately following harrowing accounts of violence perpetrated by MS-13, Trump unveiled his “four pillar immigration plan” which includes the following measures:

- 1) Path to citizenship for 1.8 million illegal immigrants, brought to the country by their parents at a young age.
- 2) Building a great wall on the southern border
- 3) Ends visa lottery program
- 4) Ends chain migration

(Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address, 2018, Jan 30).

Taken in context of Trump’s long history of derogatory comments towards immigrants, including his derision of protections for arrivals from “shithole countries,” (Referring to Haiti, El Salvador, and nations in Africa), the four-pillar immigration strategy has clear racial motivations. Cancelling DACA, ending the temporary protective status (TPS) of thousands of legal residents from Haiti and El Salvador, barring entry for people from several Muslim majority countries, implementation of “merit based” immigration from nations like Norway, also serve to sway U.S. demographics back towards a European majority. Trump’s State of



Union address also serve the twin function of solidifying the discursive link between immigration and opioid addiction, and the rash of overdose deaths accompanied by it. Nowhere in the speech does Trump mention plans to tackle the over-prescription of addictive painkillers, or to quell aggressive campaigns by pharmaceutical companies to market opioids. As Trump remarked,

These reforms will also support our response to the terrible crisis of opioid and drug addiction. Never before has it been like it is now. It is terrible. And we have to do something about it.

In 2016, we lost 64,000 Americans to drug overdoses: 174 deaths per day. Seven per hour. We must get much tougher on drug dealers and pushers if we are going to succeed in stopping this scourge.

My administration is committed to fighting the drug epidemic and helping get treatment for those in need. The struggle will be long and difficult—but, as Americans always do, we will succeed, we will prevail.

(Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address, 2018, Jan 30).

## **B. The Role of the Judiciary**

Much of Hall et al.'s (1978) investigation into the ideological construction of the 'mugging epidemic' was comprised of analysis of judges' admonitions and statements during the sentencing of accused 'muggers.' These statements, Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate, "commanded press attention" (p. 31), and as a result, the language judges used to describe the 'crime of mugging' during trials and sentencing was picked up in media reports, amplified and circulated widely to different publics. Hall et al. (1978) show that from August 1972 to August 1973, reports of court cases involving 'mugging crimes' significantly outnumbered reports of actual 'mugging events.' The amplification of judges' sentencing statements, Hall et al, (1978) contend, "allowed the judges to define and structure the public

definition of 'mugging', and of the 'wave of muggings' in particular" (p. 32). One common trope that was featured in almost all of the statements was the judge's need to justify lengthy sentences for a group of crimes that were once categorized as petty theft. The justification was often centered on the need for exemplary action to quell rising 'social permissiveness' that had spurred a wave of crimes fitting the newly constructed category of crime:

'mugging'. These judicial statements, and their subsequent dissemination in press reports, served a prominent role in the discursive construction of a 'moral panic' around a perceived wave of mugging crimes. The role of the press in constructing moral panics, therefore must be, "analysed together with those other collective agencies in the 'mugging' drama—the central apparatus of social control in the state: the police and the courts" (p. 30). In spite of Hall et al.'s (1978) findings, judicial speech is seldomly seen as worthy of serious analysis. One of the reasons, Hall et al. (1978) explain is that judicial statements are usually taken as objective fact and are thus "shielded from publicly scrutiny" (p. 33). As Hall et al. (1978) contend:

The law stands, formally, outside of the political processes of the state, and above the ordinary citizen. Its rituals and conventions help to shield its operations from the full blaze of publicity and from the force of public criticism. The 'judicial fiction' is that all judges impartially embody and represent 'the Law' as an abstract and impartial force: individual differences of attitude and viewpoint between different judges; and the informal processes by which common judicial perspectives come to be formed, and by which the judiciary orientates itself, in a general way, within the field of force provided by public opinion and official, political or administrative opinion, are normally shielded from public scrutiny, and have rarely been studied or written about in any systematic way. The judiciary remains a closed institutional sphere within the state, relatively anonymous, represented in its institutional rather than its individual person, and protected, in the last resort, by the threat of contempt. (p.33-34)

This study extends on this belief, but further contends that members working at the highest levels of the judicial branch can inform the discourses and practices of not only the

media, but also lower courts and local, state and federal law enforcement. In particular, this study focuses on the Department of Justice and its head, the U.S. Attorney General. The Department of Justice was established by the 1870 congress, giving the Attorney General, “direction and control of U.S. Attorneys and all other counsel employed on behalf of the United States.” The mission of the U.S. Attorney General, as defined by the Department of Justice is to, “supervise and direct the administration and operation of the Department of Justice, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Bureau of Prisons, Office of Justice Programs, and the U.S. Attorneys and U.S. Marshals Service...” (ORGANIZATION, MISSION & FUNCTIONS MANUAL, n.d.). The U.S. Attorney General is thus granted wide oversight authority and power to influence policies and directives of all federal law enforcement and judicial bodies.

Recently, there has been much turmoil and controversy within the U.S. Department of Justice, especially surrounding the investigation into collusion with Russian, which is still ongoing at the time of this study and therefore will not be discussed in detail here. The Justice Department, and in particular, Trump’s pick for Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, nonetheless played a prominent role in architecting and implementing the President’s vision on immigration and crime. Jeff Sessions was one of Trump’s earliest and most ardent supporters, and was at one point considered as a potential running mate. At just over nine months, Jeff Sessions’ tenure as Attorney General is one of the shortest in U.S. history, but while in office, Sessions quickly established himself as an aggressive sponsor of a ‘law and order’ regime, and as the principle legal advisor of the government, was instrumental in setting the administration’s tough stances on immigration, travel bans from Muslim

countries, and drug enforcement policy. Sessions took little time to install his ‘law and order’ vision—within the first few months as acting Attorney General rescinding an Obama era memo aimed at rolling back mandatory sentencing practices for minor drug offenses, widely known to have led to disproportionate incarceration of minority drug defendants, threatening to block funding for sanctuary cities for failing to comply with the immigration policies of the Trump administration, and to promising prosecute anyone harboring an illegal immigrant, while supporting Trump’s controversial executive order to ban travel from several Muslim majority nations. Session’s tenure as Attorney General ended on November 7, 2018, when he resigned at the request of the president. The resignation came a day after the 2018 midterm elections and is widely believed to be motivated by Trump’s ire over Sessions’ decision to recuse himself from the investigation into Russia meddling in the 2016 election. In his brief time as Attorney, Sessions established directives and priorities for judges and prosecutors, as well as local, state and federal and law enforcement (Newkirk II, 2018, Jun 18). One of the most important channels for the propagation of Sessions’ worldview, were a series of speeches delivered to members of law enforcement and judicial committees. These speeches occurred in locations scattered across the nation and were delivered to specialized audiences, mostly members of law enforcement and the judiciary. The reach of Sessions’ speeches, however was far wider, viewed by many as live telecast, and subsequently chopped up into soundbites heard on the radio, clips seen on talk shows and news segment, or quotes read in web and print publications. The major talking points were often repeated by other members of the judiciary, law enforcement, as well as politicians and the media, demonstrating the influence of Sessions’ political discourse. With this power comes the potential to shape not

only drug and criminal justice policies, but also discourses around them. Of particular interest to this project are the discursive practices deployed in response to the opioid crisis.

### **C. Methodology**

This chapter examines public speeches delivered by Jeff Sessions during his tenure as Attorney General, which lasted from February 9, 2017 to November 7, 2018. During this time period Sessions delivered 307 public speeches. All transcripts of public speeches given by the U.S. Attorney are published on the United States Department of Justice website ([www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov)). For the purpose of limiting the data set to speeches relevant to the topic of analysis, only speeches containing the keyword “opioid” were selected. In all, there were 70 speeches which included at least one reference to opioids, representing 22.8 percent of the total speeches delivered. These speeches were held in all four census regions of the U.S. (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) and all nine divisions within these regions (*East North Central, West North Central, East South Central, South Atlantic, Pacific, Mountain, West South Central, Mid Atlantic, and New England*). In the *East North Central* division these included, Columbus OH, Toledo, OH, Cleveland, OH, Indianapolis, IN, Green Bay, WI, and Plimouth, MI. In the *West North Central* region these included Fargo, ND, St. Louis, MO, Kansas City, MO, and Minneapolis, MN. In the *East South Central* region these included Louisville KY, Lexington, KY, Memphis, TN, Nashville, TN, Gatlinburg, TN, and Birmingham, AL. In the *South Atlantic* region these included Richmond, VA, Quantico, VA, Alexandria, VA, Tallahassee, FL, Tampa, FL, Raleigh, NC, Charleston, WV, Lithicum Heights, MD, and Washington, D.C). In the *Pacific* region these included Sacramento, CA, and Portland, OR. In the *New England* region these included Manchester NH, Portland, ME, Concord, ME, and Boston, MA. In the *Mountain* region these included Bozeman, MT,

Billings, MT, Las Vegas, NV, Reno, NV, Las Cruces, NM, Denver, CO, and Salt Lake City, UT. In the *West South Central* region these included Midwest City, OK, Dallas, TX, and Houston, TX). In the *Mid-Atlantic* region these included Pittsburgh, PA, Philadelphia, PA, Harrisburg, PA, New York, NY and, Central Islip, NY.

The Attorney General spoke at a diverse range of events, as indicated in the speech title, including the Indiana Law Enforcement Conference, the Opioid Research Summit, Attorney General's Awards for Distinguished Service in Policing, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's event, National Narcotics Officers' Association's Coalition Drug Enforcement Forum, 63rd Biennial Conference of the National Fraternal Order of Police, "West Virginia on the Rise: Rebuilding the Economy, Rebuilding Lives," The Reagan Alumni Association's Celebration of President Reagan's Birthday, The National Association of Attorneys General Annual Winter Meeting, the DEA Graduation Ceremony, The Global Forum on Asset Recovery Hosted by the United States and the United Kingdom, the Gangs Across The Carolinas Training Symposium, the 30th DARE Training Conference, the Western Conservative Summit, the 24th Annual Joint Conference of the Montana Association of Chiefs of Police and the 88th Annual Montana Police Protective Association, the Gatlinburg Law Enforcement Training Conference, the Sergeants Benevolent Association of New York City Award Presentation, the DEA360 Heroin and Opioid Response Summit, the 26th Annual Law Enforcement Legislative Day Hosted by the California Peace Officers' Association, the New Hampshire Youth Summit on Opioid Awareness and The Abraham Lincoln Foundation Of The Union League Of Philadelphia's Annual Lincoln Day Celebration.

The remarks were delivered to several different audiences including police associations

and alliances, law enforcement training centers, fraternal orders and societies, task forces, and judicial bodies and committees. These audiences, as specified in the title of the presentations consisted of members of the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center, the Joint Interagency Task Force South, the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children, Federal Law Enforcement, Law Enforcement, Federal, State and Local Law Enforcement Partners, the National District Attorneys Association, the National Fusion Center Association, the Oklahoma Sheriffs' Association, the National Association of School Resource Officers, the National Sheriffs' Association, the Major County Sheriffs' Association, the Michigan Chapter of the Federalist Society, the Elder Justice Coordinating Council Senate, the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, and the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The speeches covered a range of topics related to drug, immigration, and criminal justice, as specified by key words in the title of the speech. These included, the 'Opioid crisis', 'Sanctuary Cities,' 'Transnational Criminal Organizations,' 'Importance of Project Safe Neighborhoods,' 'Drug Impaired Driving,' 'Immigration Enforcement,' 'Nationwide Injunctions,' 'Trump Administration's Response to the Opioid Epidemic,' 'Efforts to Combat Violent Crime and Restore Public Safety,' 'Efforts to Reduce Violent Crime and Fight the Opioid Crisis,' 'Fight Against the Opioid Epidemic and Violent Crime,' 'Department of Justice's Efforts to Combat Drug Trafficking and End the Opioid Crisis,' 'Announcing the Prescription Interdiction and Litigation Task Force,' 'AlphaBay Takedown,' 'Immigration and Law Enforcement Actions,' 'National Security and Immigration Priorities of the Administration,' 'Eradicating Violent Crime in America,' 'New Tools to Combat the Opioid

Crisis,’ ‘Project Safe Neighborhoods,’ ‘Violent Crime Reduction Across the United States,’ ‘New Stop School Violence Grants,’ ‘Ongoing Efforts to Reduce Violent Crime’ ‘New Indictments in International Fentanyl Case’ ‘Efforts to Combat Violent Crime,’ ‘Deadly Fentanyl Crisis,’ ‘National Health Care Fraud and Opioid Takedown,’ and ‘Drug Crisis’

A cursory examination of the speech titles shows that they mostly cover topics related to violent crime, immigration and drugs, were delivered to influential members and bodies within the law enforcement and judicial communities and occurred in geographic locations spread across the nation. Together, they present a compelling picture of the Trump Administration’s agenda as it relates to the opioid crisis, and offer a rich body of speech worthy of critical analysis

To begin the analysis, all transcripts of the speeches were imported into NVivo qualitative software, organized into nodes and coded according to topic. Through thorough review of the speeches, three top level nodes were identified. Top level nodes are the broad overarching themes, and were identified as *violent crime*, *immigration*, and *drugs*— themes that are consistent with the trends observed in the speech titles. Some units of the speech were coded into multiple nodes. Multiple subtopics and sub-subtopics falling under the larger nodes of *violent crime*, *drugs* and *immigration* were identified and categorized as smaller “child” nodes. The following statement from a speech delivered in Pittsburgh, PA on January 29, 2018, for example, was coded into the top-level theme nodes of *drugs* and *violent crime*.

I don’t think it was a coincidence that violent crime and drug abuse rose at the same time. I was just reading one of our Department-funded studies that found that nearly a quarter of the increase in homicides is the result of the increase in drug-related homicides.



Transcripts from the 70 speeches were also imported into the open-source software, *Voyant Tools*, available to for public use at [www.voyant-tools.com](http://www.voyant-tools.com). This software uses algorithms to determine frequencies and collocations of terms. The collocation function allows the user to determine terms that appear in close proximity to one another at greater frequency than chance. Voyant Tools processes the text data and produces a representation of the collocates as a network. The size of the node in which the term appears represents the frequency of its use in the text and the relative width of the intersecting lines represent the strength of the relationship between keyword and collocates. Keywords are shown as blue nodes and collocates (words in proximity) are shown as orange nodes. The following graphic (figure 22) offers a visualization of relationship between the three most commonly used terms in corpus of 70 speeches and their collocates. From the graphic it can be inferred that the term “drug” is often found in close proximity of the terms “trafficking,” “abuse,” “crisis,” “overdose” and “overdoses.” Meanwhile there seems to be a strong relationship between “law” and “enforcement” likely because these two terms appear together frequently as “law enforcement.” Unsurprisingly, enforcement often appears in close proximity to “local,” “state,” and “federal,” while “law” is often “federal” “officers” and “percent”

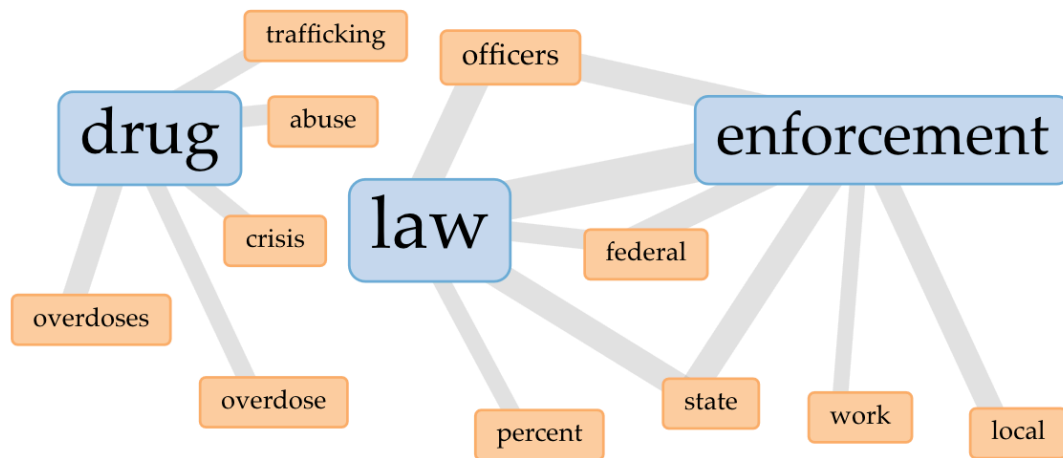


Figure 22: The terms “drug” “law” and “enforcement” and their collocates

While these graphics can act as a useful analytical tool to chart relationships between concepts and terms, they do not offer a comprehensive view, unless supplemented by deep readings and contextual analysis. The following section integrates the results from qualitative analysis of data processed NVivo software, the graphic visualizations of links between key terms, and critical discourse analysis.

#### **D. Results**

A simple word frequency was run to tally most commonly used words, including all stemmed words; i.e., *talk* would also include *talking* and *talked*. Words under 4 letters were excluded from the results to avoid common such as *the* and *and*. ‘Drug’ was by a wide margin the most frequently used word, uttered 911 times across 70 speeches, representing a 1.35% weighted percentage of all words used. ‘Enforcement’ was the second most frequently used word (669) followed by ‘crime’ (633), ‘department’ (455), ‘year’ (604),

‘officers’ (561), ‘works’ (496), ‘opioid’ (488) ‘department’ (469) ‘states’ (460), ‘thanks’ (453), ‘people’ (409), ‘American’ (378), ‘country’ (365), ‘want’ (360), ‘president’ (349), ‘percent’ (346), ‘violent’ (336), ‘federal’ (334), ‘justice’ (318), ‘criminal’ (312), ‘attorney’ (292), ‘just’ (287) and ‘overdoses’ (284). For comparison, the word “*pharmaceutical*” was only used twice in the 70 speeches.

Next, a matrix coding query was run to determine frequencies of cross coding between child nodes. This was performed to determine the frequency in co-occurrence of salient themes in the same segment of speech. Matrix coding, for instance, allowed the researcher to determine how many times the child nodes of *opioids* and *increases in violent crime* were cross-coded in the same segment of the speech. Although this tool does not provide a complete picture, it performs the important function of charting connections between nodes, and the frequencies of nodal connections. To show the most frequently connected themes, only child nodes that were cross-coded more than 10 times were included in the tables. Table 10 below shows all child nodes included under the parent node of ‘crime,’ and the frequency of cross-tabulation with other child nodes within the data set.

Table 10: Frequency of cross-coding between drug related and non-drug related nodes

Parent Node: Drugs	
Child Node (Number of times coded)	Cross-code (frequency)
Drug Cartels (25)	Violent Gangs (11)
Opioids (70)	Increase in Violent crime (24)
Opioid Enforcement (25)	Prosecutions (16)
Opioid Overdoses (49)	Online Sales and Distribution of Opioids (13)
Increase in Opioid Overdoses (60)	Southern Border (10) Increase in Violent Crime (15)
Decrease in Opioid Overdoses (27)	Decrease in Violent Crime (14) Prescription Opioids (11)
Fentanyl (40)	Immigration Policy (10)
Prescription Opioids (78)	Opioid Overdoses (27)
Opioid Trafficking (46)	Southern Border (10) Increase in Violent Crime (17) Gangs (10)

Table 11: Frequency of cross-coding between crime related and non-crime related nodes

<b>Parent Node: Crime</b>	
<b>Child Node (Number of times coded)</b>	<b>Cross-code (frequency)</b>
Violent Crime (77)	Increase in Opioid Overdose (10) Opioid Trafficking (17) Immigration Policy (11) Southern Border (14) Violent Gangs (17) MS-13 (14)
Increase in Violent Crime (71)	Increase in Opioid Overdoses (14) Violent Gangs (17)
Decrease in Violent Crime (111)	Decrease in Opioid Overdose (14)
Violent Gangs (47)	Drug Cartels (16) Opioids (24) Increases in Opioid Overdoses (11) Opioid Trafficking (13) Southern Border (10) MS-13 (11) Increase in Violent Crime (14),
MS-13 (27)	Immigration Policy (13) Southern Border (13) Violent Crime (14) Violent Gangs (11)
Prosecution (91)	Enforcement (10) Fentanyl (16) Prescription Opioids (27)
Enforcement (25)	Prosecution (10)

Table 12: Frequency of cross-coding between immigration related and immigration-crime related nodes

<b>Parent Node: Immigration</b>	
<b>Child Node (Number of times coded)</b>	<b>Cross-code (frequency)</b>
Immigration Policy (36)	Southern Border (22) Sanctuary Cities (15) Violent Crime (11) MS-13 (13)
Southern Border (39)	Fentanyl (10) Increase in Opioid Overdoses (10) Opioid Trafficking (10) Increase in Violent Crime (14) Gangs (10) MS-13 (13) Immigration Policy (22)
Sanctuary Cities (20)	Immigration Policy (15) Southern Border (11) MS-13 (10)

The parent nodes of “drugs” “crime” and “immigration” represent the three main crises facing America, as recognized by Jeff Sessions in the corpus of his speeches. The researcher, therefore, was interested in how the term “crisis” was mapped conceptually and in relation to other key terms. Figure 23 below shows that the five most common collocates of “crisis” were “American,” “end,” “history,” “ongoing” and “deadliest.” This suggests that these crises, are particular to American context, are ongoing, and the deadliest in history. These five most frequent collocates, were attached to their own collocates, including “illegal,” “immigration” “drug,” “opioid,” “epidemic,” “death” and “marketplace.” These terms suggest that crisis label is applied to not only the opioid epidemic, but also to illegal immigration.

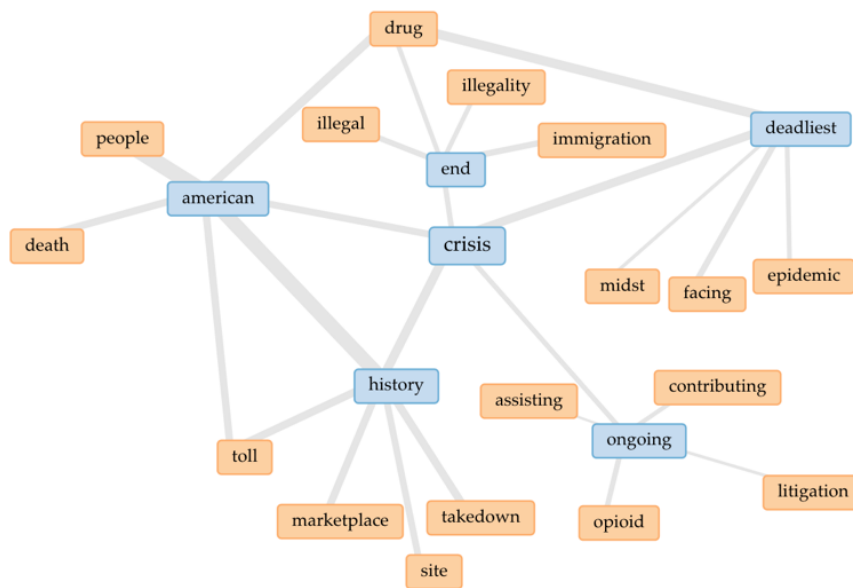


Figure 23: Most frequent collocates for the term “crisis”

Although the figures and tables above contain important data about the relationships between terms and themes, they need to be supplemented with rich contextualization. Deeper contextual analysis of the speeches, in combination with interpretations of the models and matrices above, nonetheless do support the trends identified. Analysis of the term “crisis” in the context of the corpus, show that it was often used to describe the opioid epidemic, the recent wave of violent crime and immigration, and these themes were often interrelated rhetorically. Commonly, the “crisis” label was used to call for “restoring” the “rule of law.” In the following, and in many other similar statements Sessions uses the drug crisis as a for the strengthening of federal local and state agencies to enforce drug laws, combat transnational cartels, end illegal immigration and boost border security.

The DEA’s work of enforcing our drug laws has never been more important than it is right now. That is because today we are facing the deadliest drug crisis in American history. Approximately 64,000 Americans lost their lives to drug overdoses in 2016, and preliminary data show another, but smaller, increase for 2017. (1/26/2018, Quantico, VA)

Sessions also often rhetorically links a recent rise in crime rates to the opioid crisis and the trafficking operations of transnational cartels, even though no studies have supported such a correlation.

To turn back this rising tide of violent crime, we need to confront the heroin and opioid crisis in our nation – and dismantle the transnational cartels that bring drugs and violence into our neighborhoods. (6/15/2017, Richmond, VA).

Simultaneously, the term “crisis” is applied to justify the construction of a wall on the Southern border, even as statistics show that illegal border crossings are at an all-time low. In the following statements from diverse geographic location, the “crisis” at the border is not tied to immigration, but also, “death” “violence” and “addiction.”

We have a crisis at the border. Last month, we saw a significant increase in illegal border crossings from the lows we saw last year. We saw a steep drop after President Trump’s inauguration with record low illegal crossings for most of his first summer in office. But now illegal entries have begun increasing again. Some of it could simply be the Trump economy, which has been booming. It’s no surprise that the lure of employment is a magnet for illegal immigration. The lack of a wall on the southern border is an open invitation to illegal border crossings. The failure of Congress to move on the wall and to take other necessary steps is sending a message of irresolution and uncertainty (4/11/2018, Las Cruces, NM).

If we’re going to end the drug crisis, we need a secure border. And if we’re going to have a secure border, then we need a wall. (6/8/2018 Denver, CO).

We also know that most of the heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and fentanyl that is fueling the drug crisis was brought across our southern border by powerful drug cartels, bringing violence, addiction and death. An important factor in our long-term success requires securing our borders (10/18/2018, Washington D.C.)

The topic of violence is one that traverses the three primary themes of drugs, immigration and crime. The drug crisis is described as breeding violence, immigrants are cast as prone to violence, and crime is characterized as increasingly violent in nature. The following section

examines how a narrative of violence is constructed through Sessions' discourse

### **1. "Violent Crime is back with a vengeance"**

The theme of rising violent crime rates is one that holds a prominent position in Sessions' discourse. Of the 70 speeches, over half included comments citing increasing rates of violent crime. In all, there were 77 references to increasing crime rates. Of the 77 unique statements citing increases in violent crime, there were 31 statements specifically citing spikes in violent crime during the last two years of the Obama administration (2014-2016). These statements appeared in speeches in diverse geographic locations including, Pittsburgh, PA (3), Philadelphia, PA (1), Louisville KY (2), Lexington, KY (1), Midwest City, OK (2), St. Louis, MO (1), Kansas City, MO (1), Columbus OH (1), Toledo, OH (1), Salt Lake City, UT (1), Washington, D.C. (7), Billings, MT (1), Richmond, VA (1), Sacramento, CA (1), Memphis, TN (1), Nashville, TN (1), Denver, CO (1), Dallas, TX (1), Las Vegas, NV (1), Minneapolis, MN (1) and Hutchinson, KS (1), Birmingham, AL (1), Indianapolis, IN (1). It should be noted that 18 out of the 23 speech locations were in states taken by Donald Trump in the 2016 election (excluding Washington D.C.). Many of the statements are identical or nearly identical and include multiple references to national and regional increases in the overall violent crime rate (36 references), murder rate (38 references), rape (16 references), aggravated assault (16) and robbery (13). So many of the speeches are so similar it appears there was a standard template used and statistics about crime and overdose rates customized to reflect local trends in the location of the speech. The formula goes something like this: Crime was falling for two decades, the Obama administration took office, crime and addiction began to rise, Trump was elected and has begun to restore the 'rule of law.' In a June 2018 speech given at the Western Conservative Summit in Denver Colorado, Sessions

provides an example representative of this formula:

Crime had been declining for two decades. The violent crime rate had been cut in half. The murder rate was cut in half. Aggravated assault was cut almost in half. Robbery fell by 62 percent. But from 2014 to 2016, those trends reversed. In the last two years of the Obama administration, the violent crime rate went up by nearly seven percent. Robberies went up. Assaults went up nearly 10 percent. Rape went up by nearly 11 percent. Murder increased by more than 20 percent. But under President Donald Trump, we are stopping these trends. He is a strong supporter of our law enforcement efforts. As he said during Police Week, “If we want to bring violent crime down, then we must stand up for our police.” And make no mistake, our goal is to bring crime down. In the Trump era, the ACLU isn’t making our law enforcement policies. The professionals are.

The following excerpts from speeches in Midwest City, OK, Kansas City, MO, Toledo, OH, and Tampa, FL are also representative of the Attorney General’s talking points about violent crime trends:

After decreasing for nearly 20 years because of the hard but necessary work our country started in the 1980s, violent crime is back with a vengeance. In 2016, the nationwide homicide rate increased by another 7.9 percent, resulting in a total surge of more than 20 percent since 2014. Not a little matter. (10/19/2017, Midwest City, OK)

But from 2014 to 2016, the trends reversed. The violent crime rate went up by nearly seven percent. Robberies went up. Assaults went up nearly 10 percent. Rape went up by nearly 11 percent. Murder shot up by more than 20 percent. Here in Missouri, the violent crime went up by 17 percent over those two years. The murder rate went up by a third. Robbery went up by 16 percent. Aggravated assault went up by 18 percent. Here in Kansas City, the violent crime rate went up by a third. (9/13/2018, Kansas City, MO).

But over the last two years, the trends have reversed. The violent crime rate is up by nearly seven percent. Robberies are up. Assaults are up nearly 10 percent. Rape is up by nearly 11 percent. Murder is up by more than 20 percent. According to the new Department of Justice study, nearly a quarter of the increase in homicides is the result of the increase in drug-related homicides. It’s why I keep saying that drug trafficking is an inherently violent business. Meanwhile, more Americans are dying because of drugs than ever before. Last year, an estimated 64,000 Americans died of drug overdose—one every nine minutes. That’s nearly the population of Youngstown. Millions of Americans are living with the daily struggle of addiction. And for Americans under the age of 50, drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death. These trends are not a blip or an anomaly. I fear that, if we do not act now and smartly, this nation could see decades of progress reversed. Sadly, this beautiful city has not been immune to these problems. In Toledo, rape is up 36 percent in just two years. Assault is up 15 percent. And murders



are up an astonishing 54 percent. We cannot accept these trends. And statewide, drug overdose deaths are up 60 percent in just two years. (Toledo, OH 12/18/2018)

It was largely because of officers like you that crime declined in America for 20 years. It was a historic transformation. But from 2014 to 2016, the trends reversed. The violent crime rate went up by nearly seven percent. Murder shot up by more than 20 percent. We began to suffer the deadliest drug crisis in our history. More Americans are dying because of drugs than ever before. 2016 saw an estimated 64,000 Americans die of drug overdose—one every nine minutes. That’s nearly the population of Daytona Beach dead in one year. And in 2017 it appears that the death toll may be even higher. This crisis is being driven primarily by opioids – prescription painkillers, heroin, and synthetic drugs like fentanyl. In 2015, opioid overdoses killed 33,000 Americans – quadruple the number from 20 years ago (Tampa, FL 2/7/2018)

The rising crime rates cited by Sessions were attributed to several factors, including, drug trafficking, sanctuary cities, open border policies, immigration, transnational drug cartels, violent street gangs like MS-13, the “ACLU effect” and “The Ferguson Effect” as well as decreases in sentencing. On several different occasions, Sessions cited a widely dismissed theory called the “ACLU Effect” which asserts that a decline in “stop and frisks” mandated by an ACLU lawsuit, was a substantial factor contributing to rising violent crime rates in Chicago. For example, as Sessions proclaimed, in a May 2018 speech at a Law Enforcement Training Conference in Gatlinburg, TN, “If you want crime to go up, let the ACLU run the police department.” In another speech at a May 2018 law enforcement training conference in Gatlinburg, TN, Sessions directly cited the widely disputed findings of the Cassel and Fowles study, which have formed the basis of the “ALCU effect” thesis.

They asked why. They considered numerous possible causes. They concluded the 58 percent increase was caused by the abrupt decline in “stop and frisks” in 2015. There had been a horrific police shooting, protests, and an ACLU lawsuit. The settlement of that lawsuit resulted in a decline in stops from 40,000 per month to 10,000 per month. Arrests fell also. In sum, they conclude that these actions in late 2016, conservatively calculated, resulted in approximately 236 additional victims killed and over 1,100 additional shootings in 2016 alone. The scholars call it the “ACLU effect” (Gatlinburg, TN 5/8/2018)

The authority of the widely dismissed study was also elevated by media outlets—as demonstrated by the March 28, 2016 Fox News headline “‘ACLU effect’ is to blame for Chicago's sharp rise in crime, study says.” Despite being frequently cited, the “ACLU effect” does not account for trends in New York and Seattle, where the practice of stop and frisk were not followed by increases in homicide rates. Further, the ACLU’s agreement with the Chicago Police Department did not include prohibitions on the practice of stop and frisk, it only required officers to supply explanations after the fact (Rizzo, S. (2018, May 14). Simultaneously, Sessions has cited another controversial theory referred to as the “Ferguson Effect” which speculates that recent surges in homicides in U.S. cities are a result of greater scrutiny placed on police prompted by protests against police brutality and by the activist group #BlackLivesMatter (Dewan, 2017, Mar 29). Speaking in Kansas City on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Sessions claims:

Across your state in St. Louis, after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, arrests went down and violent crime went up. From 2013 to 2016, arrests fell by 18.9 percent. Meanwhile, violent crime went up by 18.5 percent. I don't think that was a coincidence. In 2016, St. Louis had a murder rate more than 10 times the national average and double the murder rate of Chicago. These numbers are deeply troubling--and especially since they represent a sharp reversal of decades of progress. (9/3/2018, Kansas City, MO )

Amid this intense public scrutiny and criticism, their morale has gone down, while the number of police officers killed in the line of duty has gone up. Many of you who are law enforcement leaders have also told us that in this age of viral videos and targeted killings of police, something has changed in policing. Some law enforcement personnel are more reluctant to get out of their squad cars and do the proactive, up-close police work that builds trust and prevents violent crime. (3/15/2017, Richmond, VA)

Unfortunately, in recent years law enforcement as a whole has been unfairly maligned and blamed for the unacceptable deeds of a few bad actors. Our

officers, deputies and troopers believe the political leadership of this country abandoned them. Their morale has suffered. And last year, amid this intense public scrutiny and criticism, the number of police officers killed in the line of duty increased 10 percent over the year before. (2/28/2018, Washington D.C.)

In the examples above the “Ferguson Effect” and the “ACLU Effect” are simultaneously used to demonstrate growing disrespect for the “rule of law” and to allocate blame for rising crime rates to ‘liberal’ ‘soft on crime’ policies. The facts Sessions presents to his primary audiences, mostly composed of federal, state, and local law enforcement, and members of judicial committees, paint a desperate picture—and desperate times, as the idiom goes, require desperate measures. For Sessions’ audiences the directive is clear: “law and order” must be restored, and in President Trump various law enforcement agencies have a sponsor of the new law and order settlement.

This storyline also holds when examining collocates of relevant terms, including “crime rates,” “violence,” “law and order” and “rule of law.” Figure 24 below shows the five most frequent collocates of the phrase “crime rate” in blue, and the in orange are the most frequent collocates of the terms in blue. The most frequent collocates of the “crime rate” were “homicide,” “steadily,” “went,” “came,” and “reversed.” These terms were used by Sessions frequently to cite rising homicide rates in several American cities including St. Louis, and how decades of falling crime rates have been “reversed.” Also of note is the “1968” in orange, which is a collocate of homicide, and is frequently mentioned by Sessions as the year that “decades” of dropping crime rates (a trend which Sessions claims has reversed). Also of note, “crime rate” was a strong collocate of “Southern” (always occurring in conjunction “border”) and “deport” –suggesting that “violent crime” was discursively tied to border security and illegal immigration. Figure 25, simultaneously shows that “violence” was a

strong collocate of “drugs,” “addiction” and “death,” and to a lesser degree “overdose” and “fentanyl.” This implies that “violence” and was strongly associated with drugs and specifically the opioid epidemic.

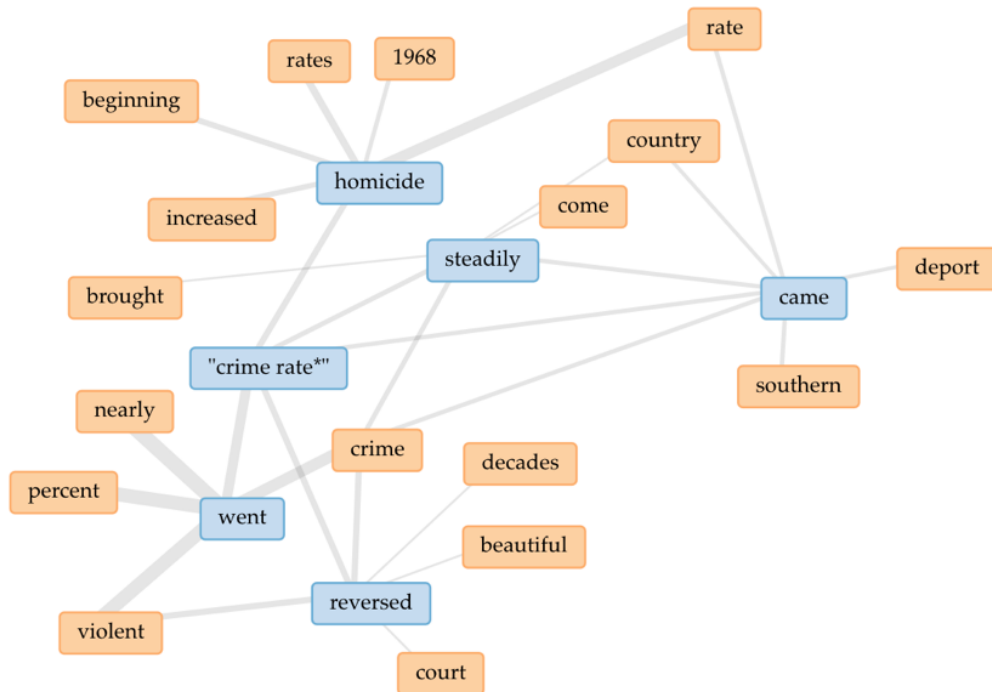


Figure 24: Most frequent collocates for the term “crime rate”

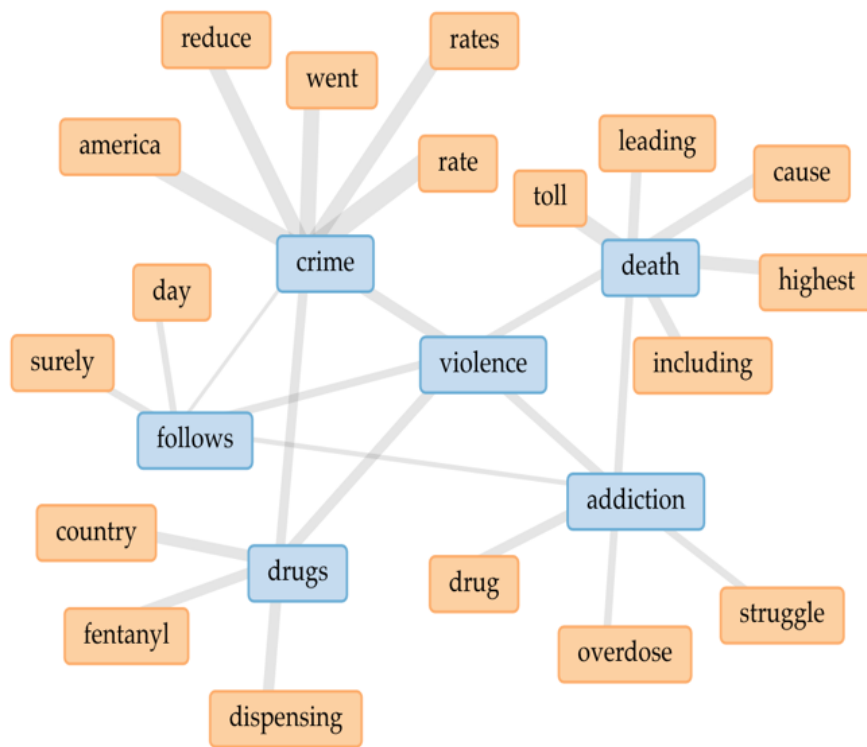


Figure 25: Most frequent collocates for the term “violence”

## 2. “Make no mistake about it: President Trump is a law and order president”

Restoring “law and order” and the “rule of law” was also a common trope in Sessions’ discourse. Figure 25 shows the degree of association between the phrase “rule of law” and other frequently-used terms in the corpus of the transcripts. “Rule of law” was frequently in close proximity to the terms, “disrespect” “decreasing” “immigration” and “restoring” and to a lesser degree “borders” “crime” and “enforcement.” First, this relationship implies a sentiment that “rule of law” has been disrespected and eroded, and thus needs to “restored.” Examination of the term supports this sentiment. As Sessions puts in bluntly in an October 2017 speech in Washington D.C. “There has been an erosion in the respect for the rule of law.” Second, there is the implication that the erosion of the “rule of law” has resulted in

crime and uncontrolled immigration. The following statement from an April 2018 speech in Las Cruces, NM illustrates this pattern.

Under President Trump’s strong leadership, we have taken a number of steps to make your jobs easier by taking criminals off the streets and by restoring the rule of law to our immigration system. (4/11/2018, Las Cruces, NM)

Disrespect for the rule of law is also listed along with other prominent crises, such as increases in violent crime, vicious gangs, the opioid epidemic, and terrorism, as seen in the following statement from an October 2017 speech in Midwest City, OK.

But today we are fighting a multi-front battle: an increase in violent crime, a rise in vicious gangs, an opioid epidemic, threats from terrorism, combined with a culture in which family and discipline seem to be eroding further and a disturbing disrespect for the rule of law (10/19/2017, Midwest City, OK)

Restoring the rule of law naturally requires a return for the “law and order” approach—which Sessions argues is embodied by Trump. This sentiment is illustrated by figure 26, which shows the phrase “law and order” is a strong collocates of “president” “Trump” “candidate” “governing” and “office”—all terms related to governance. In an October 2018 speech in Salt Lake City, UT Sessions proclaimed. “Make no mistake about it: President Trump is a law and order president” Similarly in a Toledo, OH speech Sessions declares, “President Trump was elected as the law and order President. He was elected to make America safe again and to have the backs of our men and women in blue.” These statements and many other nearly identical ones depict Trump’s law and order approach as a necessary measure to restore the rule of law.

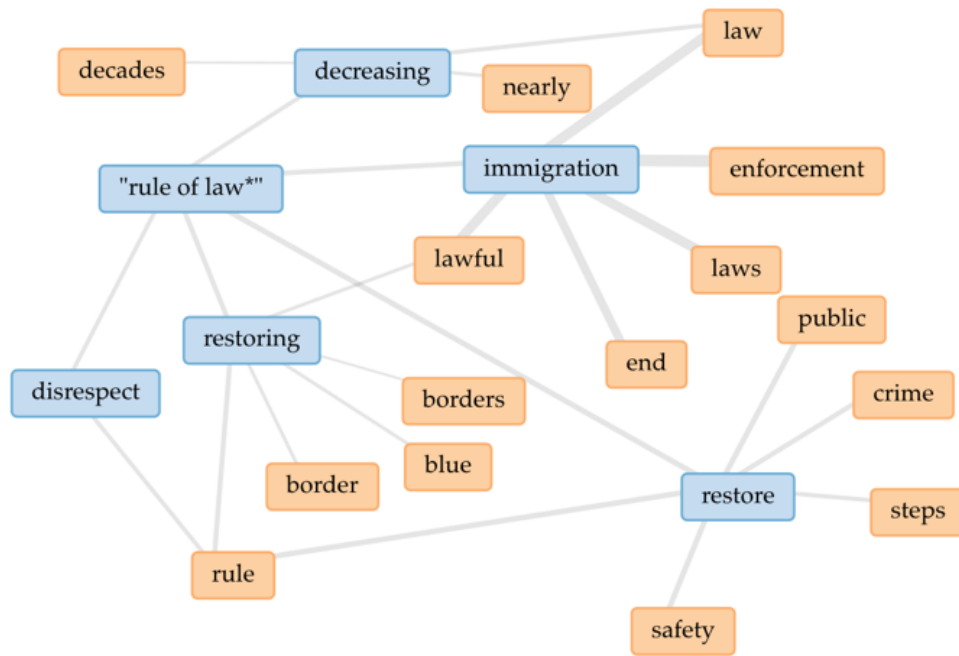


Figure 26: Most frequent collocates for the phrase “rule of law”

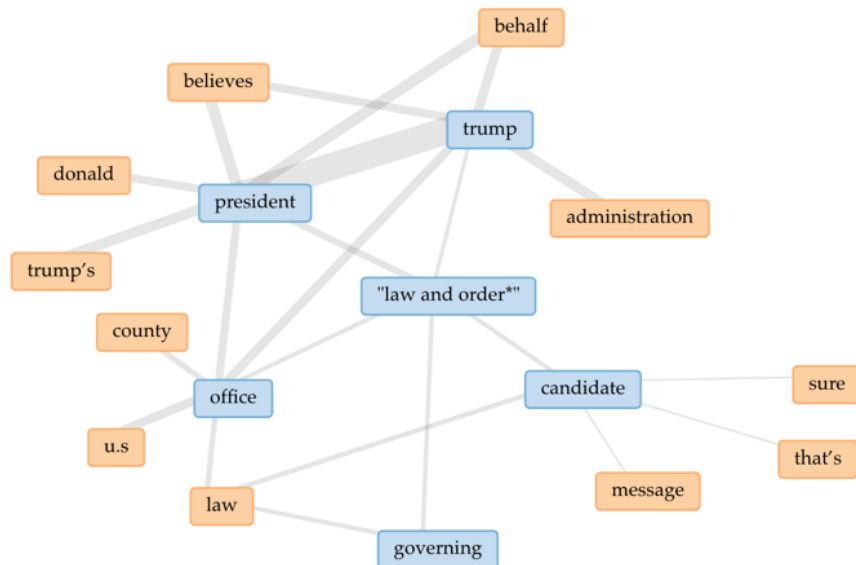


Figure 27: Most frequent collocates for the phrase “law and order”

### 3. “...they are giving sanctuary to criminals”

Another frequently mentioned source of violent crime are sanctuary jurisdictions, which are municipal jurisdictions that limit cooperation with federal authorities in their enforcement of immigration laws. Jeff Sessions made it a priority to target sanctuary jurisdictions, repeatedly threatening to block federal funds from being dispersed to cities with the sanctuary designation. In a July 2017 speech in Philadelphia, PA, and multiple others, Sessions claims that ending sanctuary policies will reduce crime, even as FBI crime data shows that crime in sanctuary counties is significantly lower than non-sanctuary counties (Wong, 2017). As Sessions remarks:

I urge the city of Philadelphia and every “sanctuary” jurisdiction to consider carefully the harm they are doing to their residents by refusing to cooperate with federal law enforcement and to re-think these policies. If we’re going to stop the rise of violent crime, then we have to work together.

Similarly, in speeches in Las Cruces, NM and Norfolk, VA Sessions claims:

Cities, states, and counties that knowingly, willfully, and purposefully release criminal aliens back into their communities are sacrificing the lives and safety of American citizens in the pursuit of an extreme open borders policy. If a jurisdiction won't accept the deportation of someone who enters illegally and then commits another crime—then who do they think should be deported? (4/11/2018, Las Cruces, NM)

These so-called “sanctuary” policies force police to release criminal aliens back into the community—no matter what their crimes. We cannot continue giving federal grants to cities that actively undermine the safety of federal law officers and intentionally frustrate efforts to reduce crime in their own cities. (1/26/2018, Norfolk, VA)

Sessions also attempts to build the case that sanctuary cities act as havens for ‘criminal aliens.’ This stance is exemplified by Sessions assertion that, ““Sanctuary” cities send a message to criminals: stay here and we will protect you” (6/15/2018, Scranton, PA). Much of the support for the sanctuary city-violent crime connection, however, is built on one case—



The killing of Kate Steinle by an undocumented immigrant in the sanctuary city of San Francisco. The Steinle incident (which was cited in five different speeches) is also part of political playbook of Donald Trump, who has tweeted about the case on 8 different occasions. When the undocumented immigrant accused of killing Steinle was acquitted of a second-degree murder charge, Trump fired off a fiery tweet, claiming that, “The Kate Steinle killer came back and back over the weakly protected Obama border, always committing crimes and being violent and yet this info was not used in court.” Trump continues, “His exoneration is a complete travesty of justice. BUILD THE WALL!” (realDonaldTrump, 2017, Dec 1). The circulation of these talking points by Sessions and Trump, and the subsequent amplification by media outlets, such as Fox News, which devoted significant airtime to the case, serves to shift the national conversation to border security, sanctuary cities and violent crime—Even as statistics show that border crossings are at an all-time low, immigrants engage in less crime than natural born citizens and sanctuary counties have lower crime rates.

Sanctuary cities are also characterized as havens for violent gangs such as MS-13 and drug traffickers—a claim that was repeated in Trump’s assertion that the sanctuary cities of Lawrence and Boston, MA act as important arteries for lethal drugs in path to predominantly white, New Hampshire. For example, in a September 2017 speech in the sanctuary city of Portland, OR, Sessions asserts that sanctuary policies, in addition to protecting “criminal aliens” shelter violent gangs and drug smugglers:

These lawless policies do more than shield individual criminal illegal aliens – they also shelter lethal gangs like the Latin Kings and MS-13. These predators thrive when crime is not met with consequences. This state of lawlessness allows gangs to smuggle guns, drugs, and even humans across borders and around cities and communities. That makes a sanctuary city a trafficker, smuggler, or gang member’s best friend. (9/19/2017, Portland, OR)

Implicit in these evaluations is that sanctuary cities reap death through violent crime and drug overdoses. When viewed in context, the term “sanctuary” often appears in close proximity to the highly charged words of “deaths” “killed” and “violent ” (see figure 28). This creates an implicit connection between deaths of Americans and illegal immigrants, and liberal policies that shelter them. Linking sanctuary cities to threat of violent was used to take aim at several immigration policies including, chain migration and the visa lottery program.

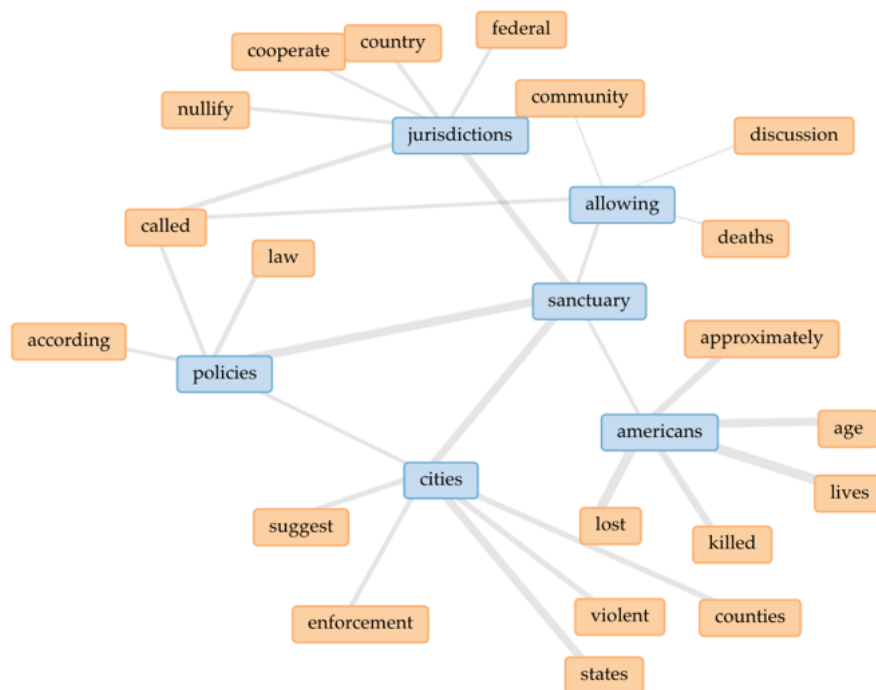


Figure 28: Most frequent collocates for the term “sanctuary”

**4. “...if we want to reduce violent crime in this country, then we have to get serious about illegal immigration.”**

The attack on sanctuary cities can be seen as part of the Trump Administration’s wider campaign to criminalize immigrants. For the large part, Sessions echoes Trump’s charged rhetoric about immigrants and immigration. For example, Figure 29 below shows that the term “immigrant” was a strong collocate with “crime” and to a lesser extent, “criminals” and “deaths.” Figure 29 shows that the term “immigration” often appears in close proximity to “addiction” “crisis” and “drug” while Figure 31 shows that the term “border” often appears in close proximity to the words “porous,” “crime,” “criminal” and “65,000.” 65,000 is significant since it is the frequently cited by Sessions as the number of overdose deaths in 2016. For example, at June 2018 speech in Scranton, PA, Sessions offered the following analysis:

In 2016, following a 37 percent increase, more than 4,000 Pennsylvanians lost their lives to drug overdoses. That’s 13 a day. Nationally—65,000. Our porous Southwest border is a big factor in this problem.

Figure 31 also illustrates this pattern. The diagram shows that the phrase “southern border” often appears in close proximity to “thousands,” which is frequently associated with the words, “Americans” “people” and “die.” In a June 2018 speech in Denver, CO, for example, Sessions connects to weak border security to the death of “thousands of Americans”

We have to understand that the vast majority of fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine in this country first came across our Southern border. Tens of thousands of Americans are being killed every year because we do not have a secure border.

In a June 2018 Scranton PA speech Sessions declares:

But even when you’re not dealing with illegal immigrant crime directly, you’re dealing with it indirectly. For example, most of the heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and

fentanyl, a synthetic opioid in this country got here across our Southern border. Tens of thousands of Americans die every year as a result. This is a huge change in how drugs are distributed. (6/15/2018, Scranton, PA)

In a Bozeman MT speech given at the 88th Annual Montana Police Protective Association, Sessions also connected, without substantiation, “illegal immigration” and a “porous Southern border” to increased risk to police officers:

Policing has always been dangerous work. But unchecked illegal immigration has made the work of police officers all across America tougher and more dangerous than it ought to be. It may not seem to be a problem here, but make no mistake about it: our porous Southern border puts you—and your brothers and sisters in uniform—at risk.

Connecting the border, and by extension, immigrants, to “thousands of deaths,” as well as the safety of police officers performs a crucial rhetorical function: to galvanize support for increased policing of the border and immigrant communities. Many of these statements are tailored to members of local, state and federal law enforcement and send a clear directive: law and order must be restored to eliminate threats to American lives—threats that in many instances are signified simultaneously by addiction and immigration. The active association between drugs, addiction, death, and immigration is a prominent theme in Sessions’ discourse, evident from the diagrams, and contextual analysis of the speeches.

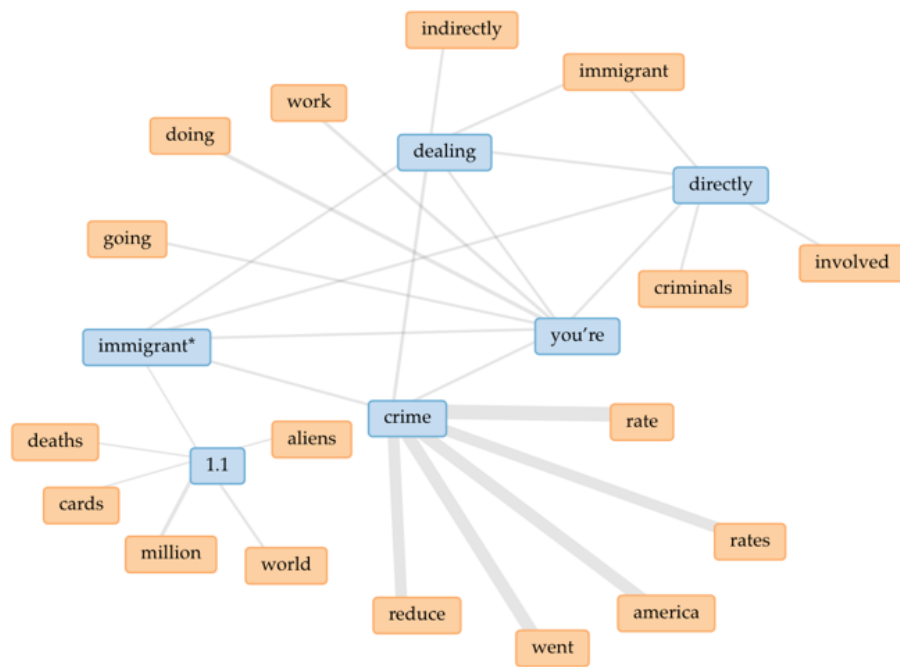


Figure 29: Most frequent collocates for the term “crime”

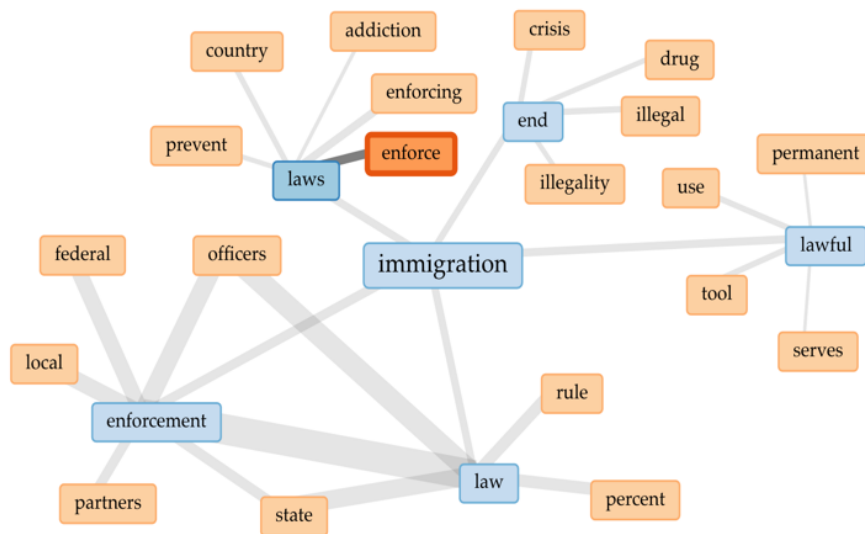


Figure 30: Most frequent collocates for the term “immigration”

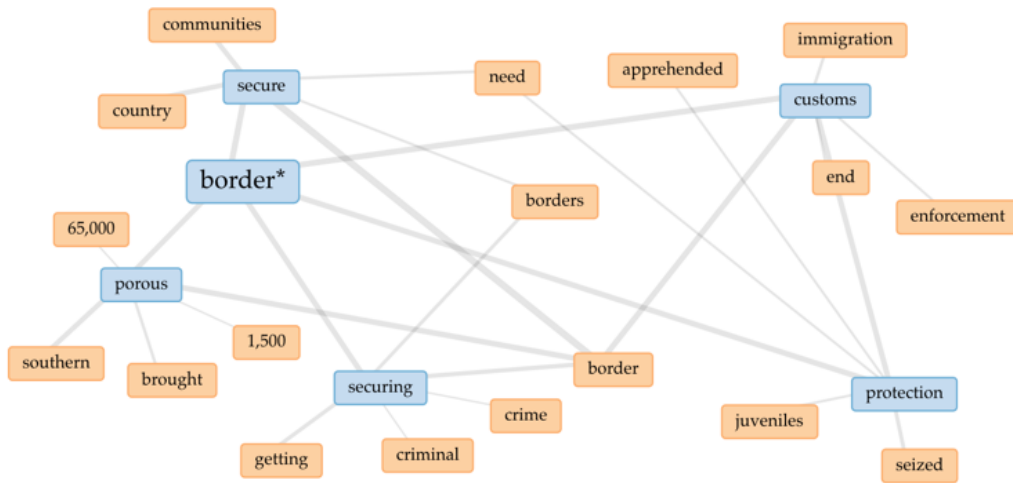


Figure 31: Most frequent collocates for the term “border”

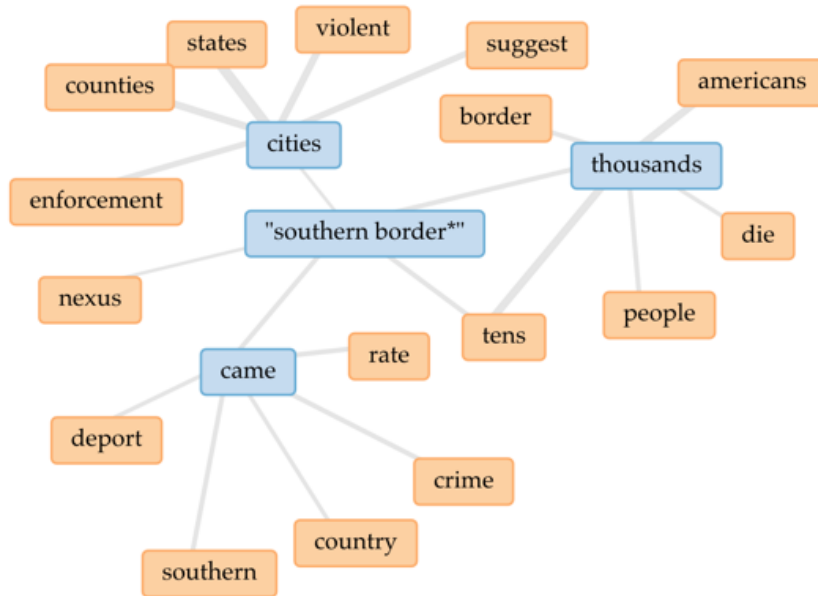


Figure 32: Most frequent collocates for the term “southern border”

Perhaps the most powerful symbolic representation of the association between violence, drugs, immigration is the notorious street gang, MS-13. The gang occupies an almost mythical space in pop culture, packing all of society's most powerful anxieties into one potent metaphor. Immediately identifiable by the trademark tattoo covered faces, the symbol of MS-13, often deployed strategically in the speeches of Trump and Sessions, activates and reinforces latent associations between violence, drugs, and immigration. MS-13's apparent motto, "kill, rape, control" was repeated by Sessions in seven different speeches, and the gang was often mentioned in the same breath as the opioid epidemic, and even radical Islamic terrorism. Sessions for example, offers the following marks in a January 2018 in Norfolk, VA:

Today we face a number of serious threats—from the vicious MS-13, to the deadliest drug epidemic in American history, to radical Islamic terrorism

MS-13 was also explicitly linked to rising overdose rates in America, drug cartels, and international trafficking of the deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl. In an October 2018 speech in Philadelphia, presented to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Sessions offers the following analysis:

We are all facing a deadly lucrative international drug trade. Drugs are killing more Americans than ever before in large part thanks to powerful cartels and international gangs and deadly new synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Perhaps the most brutal of these gangs is MS-13 – which is based in El Salvador, but whose tentacles reach across Central America, Europe, through 40 U.S. States, and to within yards of the U.S. Capitol.

These claims were also echoed in an April 2018 speech in Las Cruces, NM:

A 2,000 mile border leaves this country vulnerable to transnational criminal organizations like drug cartels, violent street gangs like MS-13, human traffickers, and other criminals who bring drugs, guns, and gang violence into our communities. Most of the heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and fentanyl in this country was not made here. It came here

across the border. These are the deadliest drugs this country has ever seen—and they are killing more Americans than ever before. From coast to coast, people are dying from drugs that were brought over this border (4/11/2018, Las Cruces, NM).

Linking MS-13 to overdoses indirectly attributes blame for thousands of American deaths to the gang. Although MS-13 is notoriously vicious, by most expert accounts the gang is not known to play a significant role in local, regional, or international drug trafficking operations. (MS-13, 2019, Mar 11).

Coding matrices in NVivo (represented in table 11) also show that the node of “MS-13” was often cross-coded with violent crime (14 times), immigration policies (13 times), the Southern border (13 times), and gangs (11 times). The node of “gangs” meanwhile was most frequently cross-coded with violent crime (17 times), increase in violent crime (14 times), opioids (13 times), opioid trafficking (13 times), cartels (11 times), increase in overdoses (11 times), MS-13 (11 times), and borders (10 times). Similar trends are also displayed in maps of collocate terms generated using Voyant. Unsurprisingly, figure 32 below shows that the key word “gang\*” was a strong collocate of “violent,” “violence,” “cartels,” “MS,” and “members.” To a lesser degree but perhaps more significantly the term “gang\*” was to a collocate of “addiction” “death,” “traffickers,” “crime” and “criminals”



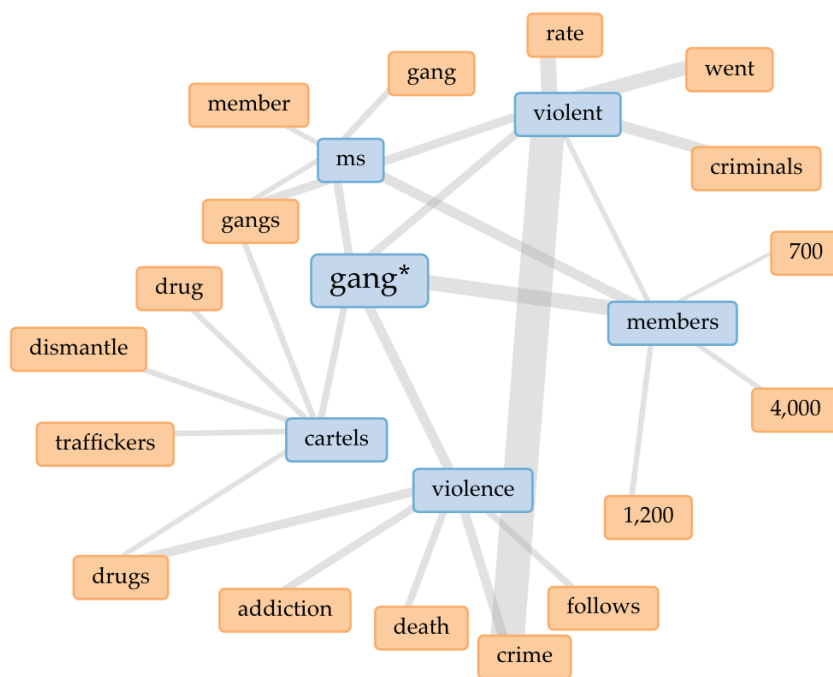


Figure 33: Most frequent collocates for the term “gang”

##### 5. “I don’t think it was a coincidence that violent crime and drug abuse rose at the same time”

The last thematic pattern identified from the data concerns the connection between rising violent crime rates and rising addiction/overdose rates. On several occasions, Sessions attempts to establish a link between violent crime and drug abuse. For example, in an October 2017 speech to the International Association of Chiefs of Police in Philadelphia PA, Sessions remarks,

I don’t think it was a coincidence that violent crime and drug abuse rose at the same time. I was just reading one of our Department-funded studies that found that nearly a quarter of the increase in homicides is the result of the increase in drug-related homicides.

An identical statement appears in a February 2018 speech in Washington D.C. In addition, the following statement was repeated verbatim in both a March 2017 speech in Richmond, VA and days later in a St. Louis, MO speech:

We can reduce the use of drugs, save lives and turn back the surge in crime that inevitably follows in the wake of increased drug abuse.

Coding matrices generated through NVivo simultaneously illustrate that that “Increases in Violent Crimes” was most frequently cross-coded with “Violent Gangs” (17 times) and “Increase in Opioid Overdoses” (14 times), while the child node of “Decreases in Violent Crime” was most frequently cross-coded with “Decreases in Opioid Overdoses.” (14 times). This suggests that there was a thematic association between violent crime rates and rates of addiction/overdose.

## **D. Discussion**

Analysis of data show that Sessions’ discourse frequently revolves around several salient tropes. First, there is the emphasis on rising crime rates and the need for a law and order regime to reverse the tide. Second, there is an attempt to link sanctuary cities, immigrants, and immigration policies to crime and addiction. Third, there is an effort to connect MS-13 to immigration policies, and rising rates of crime and addiction, and lastly, there is an association built between rising crime rates and rising addiction/overdose rates.

### **1. Rising crime**

Federal crime data consistently show that there has been a precipitous drop in violent crime over the last quarter century. The national crime rate reached its peak in 1991 at 718

violent crimes per 100,000 people, but has decreased dramatically ever since, with current rates at approximately half of 1991 levels. Over the last 25 years violent crime rates saw several small short-term increases. For example, small increases in violent crime were recorded in 2005 and 2006, but downward trends resumed thereafter. Similar increases were registered in 2015, as violent crimes jumped 2.9% nationally and data from 2016 shows a 6.3% rise (Friedman, Grawert, & Cullen, 2017). Despite these fluctuations violent crime rates remain at historic lows.

## **2. Rising Crime and Addiction**

Historically, drug epidemics have been accompanied by increases in violent crime, and political and pop culture discourses have consistently linked the two. For example, dramatic increases in youth homicide in the 1980's have been attributed largely to recruitment of young people in the illicit crack-cocaine trade (Blumstein, 1995). Correspondingly, Justice Department reports show that the sharp declines in violent crime rates can be attributed to the break-up of the crack market in the mid-1990's (Butterfield, 1998, Dec 28). Declining crime rates in the 1990's have also been attributed to demographic changes, sharp increases in incarceration, more stringent gun laws, increases in police presence, and strong growths in the economy (Levitt, 2004). While the link between violent crime and the crack epidemic was crystallized by politicians and the news media, crime rates cannot be attributed to any single factor. In fact Levitt (2004) found that the "innovative policing" was the most frequently mentioned explanation in major newspaper articles between 1991 and 2001.

While previous drug epidemics have been associated with increases in violent crime the opioid epidemic, starting in the late 1990's, curiously, has not been accompanied by a such an increase (Szalavits & Rigg, 2017). In fact, since the late 1990's violent crime rates have dropped every year, with small increases in 2005 and 2006, and in 2015 and 2016, and remain at the bottom of a 25-year decline. (Friedman, Grawert, & Cullen, 2017). The increases in violent crime between 2014 and 2016, cited frequently by Attorney General Sessions has been attributed to immigration policies, the ACLU effect and the Ferguson effect. Yet none of these theories have been proven, and given the small increases, they can be represented as large percentages, and often reflect regional, rather than national trends. For example, based on UCR statistics, the Brennan Center for Justice found that more than half of the 2015 urban increases in murders was caused by trends in just three cities: Baltimore, Chicago, and Washington, D.C and 43.7 percent of the rise in urban murders in 2016 could be attributed to Chicago alone (Friedman, Grawert, & Cullen, 2017). These statistics complicate Session's narrative that the nation is experiencing a "rising tide of violent crime", and that the recent uptick in violent crime is a result of rising addiction rates. If opioid addiction was causing violent crime to rise, violent crimes rates would presumably be higher in areas with high rates of addiction. Notably, however, areas hit the hardest by the opioid epidemic, Appalachia, The Rust Belt, and New England, did not see any significant increases in violent crime during the recent uptick, and in some cases reported declines. While the nation experienced an upsurge in violent crime in 2016, violent crimes actually declined by 3.3% in Massachusetts (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2018) and in Boston, New England's largest city, violent crime has decreased steadily each year since 1991, with the exception of small increases in 2005 and 2006 (Friedman, Grawert, & Cullen, 2017).

Furthermore, the latest FBI Uniform Crime Report statistics indicate that the New England states of Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire, are the top three safest states in the country, as measured by violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2018). According to the CDC the states with the highest opioid overdose death rate are West Virginia (52.0 per 100,000), Ohio (39.1 per 100,000), New Hampshire (39.0 per 100,000), and Pennsylvania (37.9 per 100,000) (Scholl et al. 2019, Jan 4), yet all of these states have violent crime rates that are significantly lower than the national average of 386.3 per 100,000 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2018). In 2016, the violent crime rate decreased in New Hampshire by 2.4 percent, in West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania there were increases of 3.1 percent, 1.4 percent, and 0.3 percent respectively, but all of these are below the average national increase of 3.3 percent. In comparison, the four states with the lowest opioid mortality rates in the country, Nebraska (6.7 percent increase), South Dakota (8.7 percent increase), Texas (5.3 percent increase), and Iowa (5.3 percent increase), experienced significantly sharper increases in violent crime rates from 2015 to 2016 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2018; Scholl et al. 2019, Jan 4). The 10 states with the highest violent crime rates are concentrated mostly in the southern, and southwestern United States (1. Alaska, 2. New Mexico, 3. Tennessee, 4. Louisiana, 5. Nevada, 6. Arkansas, 7. Missouri, 8. Alabama, 9. Arizona, 10. South Carolina) and typically these areas have not been impacted by the opioid epidemic as strongly as other regions in the country (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2018). Seven out of these 10 states were also in the top 10 of states with the highest mortality rate by firearms (Scholl et al. 2019, Jan 4).

There are also some inconsistencies in the reporting of crime data from 2014 to 2015. While findings from the FBI's uniform crime reporting (UCR) program recorded a 4%

increase in serious violent crimes between 2014 and 2015, Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) show no statistically significant changes in the rate of serious crime victimizations during the same period. In fact, the NCVS study shows there was a small decline in the prevalence of serious crime victimizations from 1.11% of all persons age 12 or older in 2014 to 0.98% in 2015. There were no statistically significant changes in the percentage of violent crimes reported to police from 2014 (46%) to 2015 (47%) and the rate of property crime fell from 118.1 victimizations per 1,000 households in 2014 to 110.7 per 1,000 in 2015 (Truman & Morgan, 2018). The incongruencies between the UCR and NCVS reports were not expected as the two indices "have generally demonstrated similar year-to-year increases or decreases in the levels of overall violent and property crimes" (Truman & Morgan, 2018, p. 4).

All of this suggests a much more complicated picture about the causes of violent crime in the United States. While the opioid addiction and trafficking of opioids may be a driver of violent crime in some specific localities, it cannot account for national increases in violent crime rate between 2014 and 2016. Gun laws, poverty, changes in demographics are factors shown to play a role. An alternate narrative however is presented through Jeff Sessions' remarks to law enforcement and members of the judiciary—which becomes amplified through subsequent circulation through the media.

### **3. MS-13**

While the role of cartels and gangs, smuggling, wholesaling and distribution of powerful drugs like fentanyl and all of its analogs, has been well established, MS-13 has never been a serious player in the international, national or regional drug trade. According to a

comprehensive study by InSight Crime and CLACLS at American University is a MS-13 is a transnational gang, (not a transnational criminal organization) that plays only a, “small, part-time role player in international criminal schemes” and involvement international drug trafficking have thwarted by authorities (Dudley and Silva Ávalos, 2018, p.5). Its revenues are supported by a “hand-to-mouth criminal portfolio,” which leaves it “relatively impoverished.” The largest share of its revenue comes from extortion in controlled territories, with criminal enterprises focusing on prostitution, human smuggling, larceny operations, and “petty drug dealing on a local level” mostly confined to U.S. cities like Los Angeles (Dudley and Silva Ávalos, 2018 p. 5).

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This project has employed a mix of research methods to explore the multiplicity of opioid-related discourses circulating through and from the mediascape, state actors, and citizens. Analysis of discourses at the national level and in the specificity of the Merrimack Valley revealed that the opioid crisis was often strategically linked to immigration policies. While the opioid crisis was frequently associated with ‘weak’ border policies and the harboring of “criminal aliens” in sanctuary jurisdictions, there was rarely any mention of the role of pharmaceutical companies or unscrupulous doctors. At the same time, analysis of news coverage shows that the opioid crisis is frequently framed as a public health issue rather than a criminal one. So, while *immigrants* are viewed through a punitive gaze, the *addict* is treated with compassion. The immigrant is thus faced with detention and deportation, while predominantly white users are offered second chances, diversion from prison, and access to treatment options. These contradictions are not limited to the realm of discourse—they are reinforced by policies drafted by political leaders at the uppermost echelons of the executive and judicial branches.

We are hopeful that these findings will contribute to a more complete understanding of the complex realities of the opioid crisis—including how it is mediated through discourse—and conversely, how discourse has instructed material responses on the ground. Moreover, we have optimism that this project will increase sensitivity to the conditions of despair which have fueled the opioid crisis. Finally, it is anticipated that this dissertation will generate a more thorough understanding of the intersections between the opioid crisis and right wing authoritarian populism. By theorizing these points of intersection we can better



comprehend the conditions under which Trump made an insurgent rise to power. With a more complete grasp of the “swing to the right” we can start to generate wholistic theoretical and practical interventions. In very much the same way, Stuart Hall’s seminal study of authoritarian populism in PTC was able to devise a carefully calibrated response. In 1979, following the publication of PTC, Stuart Hall urged,

No one seriously concerned with political strategies in the current situation can now afford to ignore the "swing to the Right". We may not yet understand its extent and its limits, its specific character, its causes and effects. We have so far—with one or two notable exceptions—failed to find strategies capable of mobilizing social forces strong enough in depth to turn its flank. But the tendency is hard to deny. It no longer looks like a temporary swing in the political fortunes, a short-term shift in the balance of forces. It has been well installed—a going concern—since the latter part of the 1960s. And, though it has developed through a series of different stages, its dynamic and momentum appears to be sustained. We need to discuss its parameters more fully and openly on the Left without inhibition or built-in guarantees (Hall, 1979, p. 14).

Currently, we find ourselves in an almost identical conjuncture. Just as those experiencing the rise of Thatcherism were not able to fully comprehend “its extent and its limits, its specific character, its causes and effects” (Hall, 1979, p. 14), we are still struggling to grasp the significance and implications of Trump’s ascent. Yet, if we learn from Stuart Hall and his intellectual predecessors, important insights can be gathered to inform theoretical and practical interventions to challenge the regressive and reactionary politics of authoritarian populism. In 1979, on the heels of an incipient rightward wave, Hall (1979) urges,

We must look behind the surface phenomena, we must find the points of intervention, we mustn't underestimate the capacity for resistance and struggle. But, if we are correct about the depth of the rightward turn, then our interventions need to be pertinent, decisive and effective (p. 15).

Hall (1979) follows up this call with an oft quoted avowal from Gramsci; "Pessimism of the intelligence: optimism of the will". With the invocation of this aphorism, Hall (1979) is

reviving Gramsci's spirit of optimistic resistance to hegemonic structures of control; This requires, first a pessimistic intellectual understanding and recognition of the prevailing ideological strength of the hegemon, and second, a will to challenge, oppose, and overturn it through direct action. As an epistemological intervention it compels intellectuals to resist hoarding knowledge in the halls of the academy—and instead share it with the masses to coordinate an informed response. For Hall, this is the function of the “Organic Intellectual,” a mold for scholarly intervention, which he borrows from Gramsci. The “organic intellectual” for Hall (1992) “...cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting those ideas, that knowledge, through the intellectual function, to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class” (p. 281). The current crisis therefore must be met with critical interventions that intersect with movements from the popular classes. One such possible intervention is cultivating what Scoones et al. (2018) has called “emancipatory rural politics.”

#### **A. Emancipatory Rural Politics**

Emancipatory rural politics is an ‘organic’ intellectual and political movement forged to challenge the current conjuncture which has given rise to authoritarian populism in rural pockets around the globe. According to Scoones et al. (2018), emancipatory rural politics requires a (pessimistic) “...understanding of the current regressive trends – the things to be ‘resisted’” as well as an (optimistic) “...vision of a better society and ways to move towards it” (pp. 6-7). Emancipatory rural politics is an intellectual and political movement inspired by multiple activist-scholar traditions stretching across time and discipline, including Marx’s writings on working class peasant upheaval in *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Hall’s cultural analysis of Thatcherism in 1970’s U.K. Laclau’s (2005) notion of ‘radical democracy’ and Rancière’s

(1998) concept of ‘radical equality, among many others. Emancipatory rural politics also requires a deep understanding of the economic and political conditions in rural society, which have expanded the appeal of authoritarian populism. For Scoones et al. (2018), in context of rural and post-industrial America, authoritarian populism became attractive under the following conditions:

...deindustrialisation, a product of both automation and robotics and of companies moving abroad, famously hit rural areas hard, leading to the near disappearance of jobs that paid adequate wages. Moreover, small town Main Streets, historically populated with family-owned businesses that provided both off-farm income and employment for farm households and sites of human contact and thick social networks, withered as malls and big chain stores were located in nearby areas (p. 6).

With deindustrialization and the accompanying rust and decay, much of rural America is receding into subalternity, occupying an increasingly marginal space in relation to the elite pockets in urban centers. Meanwhile, the same conditions in rural America, which have increased the appeal of autocratic leaders with promises of returns to greatness, including job flight, income inequality, the fraying of a once secure middle-class identity —have also been forces behind the opioid crisis. Accordingly, emancipatory rural politics may enhance understanding of the complex relationships between marginalized rurality and the opioid crisis, so that appropriate interventions may be devised. These activist interventions should be informed by interdisciplinary research that is committed to including perspectives from the margins or what Anzaldua (1987) has called “Borderlands”. As Scoones et al. (2018) write,

Emancipatory politics has to be generated through styles of research that are open, inclusive and collaborative, although always informed by theory and disciplined by empirical data. A commitment to emancipatory research of the rural should be situated in a deep historical perspective and attentive to hinterlands, margins and frontiers. It should be interdisciplinary, comparative and integrative, articulate the local and the global, attend to class, gender and generational dynamics, and utilise multiple approaches and

methods to corroborate findings and to highlight the many different meanings and perspectives at play (p. 12).

This research must also be concerned with representation in terms of the inclusion of marginalized voices in democratic deliberation, and should address historical legacies of racism, classism, and sexism, that have prevented equal participation. As Scoones et al. (2018) write *Emancipatory Rural Politics*,

...must combine concerns with redistribution (and so concerns with class, social difference and inequality), recognition (and so identity and identification) and representation (and so democracy, community, belonging and citizenship). Emancipation thus must encompass representation, linked to a strong state and active public sphere, as well as material distribution and recognition of diverse identities. (Scoones et al., 2018, p. 9).

In addition, this approach must consider what Hall has referred to as “the politics of representation,” not in terms of political representation through democratic institutions, but in terms of the processes of signification that produce real life subjectivities, especially for those on the margins. A politics of representation, for the purpose of this project, encompasses the various codes, including text and imagery, deployed to mediate symbolic renderings of the opioid crisis. The rapid propagation of opioid related media has created a profusion of discourses worthy of critical inquiry. For example, one symbolic contradiction that the opioid crisis has consistently laid bare, is that addiction—historically a mark of deviancy—has been pushed from the peripheries of the dominant culture and thrust into the ‘normative’ center—from the dark inner city alleyways to suburban neighborhoods with manicured lawns. With this shift there have been an explosion of sympathetic narratives about the ravages of the opioid crisis in suburban and rural locales, such as the reality television shows and docuseries, *Recovery Boys*, *Do No Harm*, *Intervention*, and *Heroin(e)*. These recovery-centric representations are a far cry from the punitive worldview thrust onto

viewers in the 1990's series, *Cops*, which routinely portrayed violent apprehensions from the perspective of the police, mainly for minor drug offenses. Race provides one lens through which we can view this dichotomy. With growing associations between the opioid crisis and whiteness, once patently 'deviant' behaviors such as intravenous drug use, are assimilated into a framework of normativity.

While attitudinal shifts about addiction have precipitated a slew of progressive drug reforms that should be lauded, the application of selective sympathies must be interrogated critically, together with the perception that the opioid crisis is entirely a white issue. Recent studies show that the opioid crisis is increasingly exacting a harsh toll on communities of color. In fact, over the last five years, rates of opioid mortality rate have seen a significantly steeper increases among blacks (43%) than whites (James and Jordan, 2018). As James and Jordan (2018) note,

While much of the social and political attention surrounding the nationwide opioid epidemic has focused on the dramatic increase in overdose deaths among white, middle-class, suburban and rural users, the impact of the epidemic in Black communities has largely been unrecognized (p. 404).

The evisceration of the black and Latinx inner city experience of opioid addiction is in large part enabled by the absence of sympathetic representations in the media. This has been especially pronounced in New England, with this project demonstrating that much of the mainstream coverage of the opioid epidemic maintains an Anglo-centric bias. Despite this, there are new signs that the opioid crisis is ravishing communities of color in with startling consequences. Nationally, the overdose rate from fentanyl and other synthetic opioids increased by 61 percent for African-Americans from 2016-2017, compared to 45 percent for whites (Scholl et al. 2019, Dec 18). While much of Massachusetts has seen signs of progress in the fight against opioid misuse, with overdose rates falling from 2017 to 2018, a *Boston*

*Globe* report shows that during this same period, significant increases were seen in urban pockets with large minority populations. For example, Hampden county, which is home to the ethnically diverse cities of Holyoke, MA and Springfield, MA, saw an increase of 84 percent between 2017 and 2018. In Springfield, opioid-related overdoses doubled in 2018 from the previous year. Lawrence, MA, also saw significant increases with 39 deaths in 2017 and 50 deaths in 2018 (representing a 28 percent increase). As the report details, other wealthier (and whiter) communities, such as Plymouth county which saw a 26 percent drop from 2017 to 2018, are “...reaping the benefits of a strong collaboration among police, addiction treatment providers, and health care workers.” Coincidentally Brockton, MA, which sits in Plymouth County, was the first in the state to have all first responded carry Narcan, the opioid-reversing drug. In comparison, Springfield Police officers only began carrying Narcan in March 2019. As the report concludes, “Progress against opioid-related fatalities has been starkly uneven, with the crisis actually worsening in certain pockets” (Freyer, 2019, Mar 15). This is troubling evidence of emerging inequalities in the fight against opioid addiction. The benefits of proven harm reduction solutions, such as Narcan, needle exchanges, expanded insurance coverage for treatment, and prison diversion programs, must be distributed evenly across diverse populations impacted by the crisis. Emancipatory rural politics should therefore be concerned with the liberation of the rural, suburban, and urban peoples in positions of marginality, but not at the expense of other subjugated segments of society.

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